

PlayStation2 | GameCube | Xbox | PC | GBA | PSP | DS | Arcade | Retro

FEATURE
GAMER'S DOZEN
Looking back on 12 months in gaming

PREVIEWED
- TIMESPLITTERS: FUTURE PERFECT [PS2/XB/GC]
- GRAN TURISMO 4 [PS2]
- BOILING POINT [PC]
- COLD FEAR [PS2/XB]
- THE MOVIES [PS2/XB/GC/PC]
- TEKKEN 5 [PS2/ARC]
- KILLER7 [GC]

REVIEWED
TACTICAL ESPIONAGE ACTION
METAL GEAR SOLID 3
SNAKE EATER
Who is lurking in the shadows?

180 PAGES FULL OF HIDDEN PROMISE

INTERVIEW
"NO MORE METAL GEAR"
Has Hideo Kojima had enough of sneaking?

PREVIEWED
BATTLEFIELD 2
War has never been this much fun


eMag



"Put it in your article, in big, bold capital letters: 'NO MORE *METAL GEAR* FOR HIDEO KOJIMA' Then I can be free." Kojima's insistence is telling; the pressure to deliver and the restriction of constantly having to evolve one of the gaming world's most enduring franchises must be quite trying, even if you are one of the industry's most innovative and revered producers.

That Kojima has delivered the goods, in spite of the somewhat underwhelming *Sons Of Liberty*, should come as no surprise; and should this really be his last outing with Solid Snake, *Metal Gear Sold 3: Snake Eater* is a fitting end to a franchise that has enthralled gamers for over 16 years.

And with that, we bid the year a fond farewell. Few could argue that 2004 hasn't been a stellar year for gamers, but next year promises to deliver even more – and we'll be here to share the wealth.

Simon Phillips,
Group Editor



EQUIP CHARACTER
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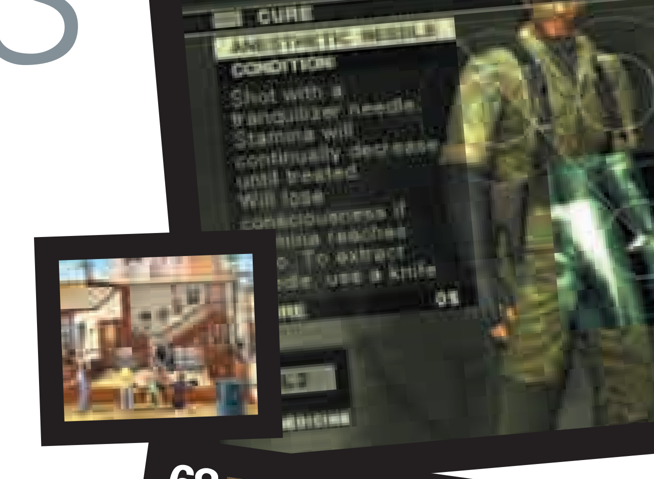

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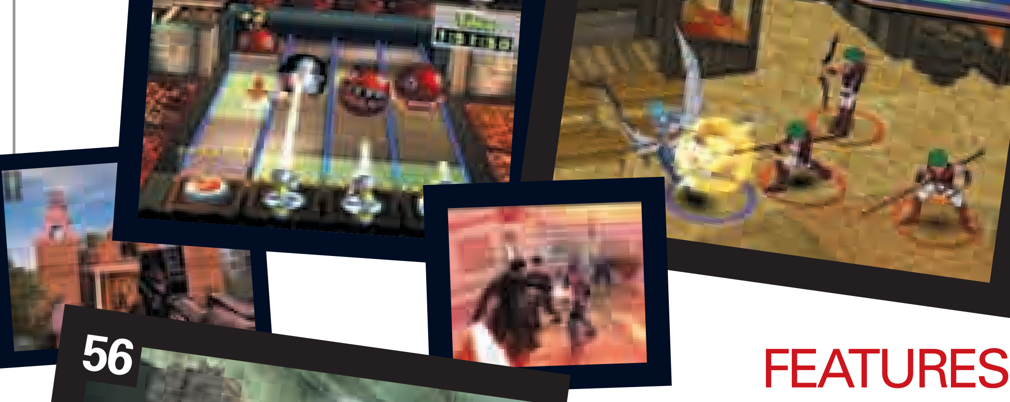
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Think that retro gaming is limited to our little scene? Think again – **games™** travels around the world and talks to retro gamers from every corner of our glorious planet.


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NEWS

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FIND OUT WHERE TO GET THE ESSENTIAL STORIES WITH OUR QUICK GUIDE TO THE NEWS



NEW HANDHELD GOES DOWN A STORM IN JAPAN AND THE US

SUCCESS FOR DS

Nintendo is celebrating the launch of its DS in the US and Japan, with one million handhelds reportedly sold across both territories. Unusually, the console arrived in America first, with gamers eagerly snapping up 500,000 DSs in its first week on sale.

Naturally, Nintendo's vice president of sales and marketing, Reggie Fils-Aime, was quick to comment on the huge demand, saying: "Consumers have voted the Nintendo DS as the hot item this holiday. Nintendo owns the handheld market… We're the hit of the holiday season."

In Japan, Nintendo again shipped around 500,000 consoles, with strong sales reported; in some cases stores opened several hours early to please shoppers waiting in long queues.

Two million DS units have been pre-ordered in the US and Japan, with Nintendo hoping to satisfy this demand by the year's end, keeping the company on track to sell 5 million units worldwide by April next year. Nintendo also plans to sell 15 million DS games in the same period.

In the week of the DS launch Nintendo also managed to shift 800,000 Game Boy Advances in the US, marking the biggest retail week ever for handheld gaming.

While it's nice to see the DS doing so well, UK gamers will have to wait until the new year to even find out a date for the DS's UK launch. Speaking at a London press event, Nintendo UK general manager David Yarnton told people to expect an announcement regarding the DS's European launch in January.

The machine is set to cost around £129.99 with games coming in at about £25. Bear in mind that in the US the DS sells for the equivalent of £80, so £129.99 seems unfair. While this kind of cross-Atlantic price hike is standard, we hope Nintendo will undercut the speculative price tag. We won't hold our breath on that, though; recent reports suggest that the company is looking to release a black DS – a bit of a kick in the teeth for those who bought early but would have liked a choice, so a price cut may be uncharacteristically generous.



ELSEWHERE IN PLANET NINTENDO

THE DS IS PROVING POPULAR, BUT WHAT OF NINTENDO'S OTHER PLANS?



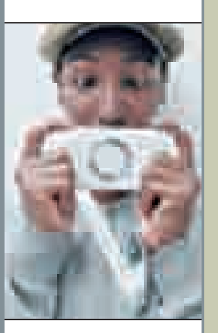
MIYAMOTO'S REVOLUTION

In a recent interview with Japanese magazine *Famitsu*, Shigeru Miyamoto suggested Nintendo plans to take its future systems (including the DS) online within three to four years. Nintendo's revered designer mentioned how the company, which has been criticised for staying offline, now believes online gaming will reach the mainstream within a couple of years, and wants to be ready to capitalise on this trend. Miyamoto also revealed the Nintendo DS will get online games in the near future, with the Wi-Fi-capable machine presumably accessing the internet via wireless network connections. Indeed, this connection could be through the Nintendo Revolution. Reports suggest all next-gen consoles will act as wireless network routers, connecting directly to home internet connections and distributing the connection wirelessly to other devices, such as PCs, printers and, of course, the DS. Miyamoto said Nintendo's online service will be developed with Square Enix, which pioneered Sony's PlayOnline system for the PlayStation2. With Nintendo on the online bandwagon, it looks likely that online gaming will be hugely important in the next generation.



STOCK SHORTAGES? NOT US

Following the news that Sony and Microsoft struggled to meet the demand for consoles this Christmas, Nintendo general manager David Yarnton was quick to defend his company's products in light of accusations that the only reason Nintendo had plenty of stock is because no-one wants the GameCube. "The shortage of other companies' product is perceived in some instances as a sign of success. However, it can also be seen as poor planning and forecasting," Yarnton told industry trade magazine *MCV*. "With or without stock shortages GameCube is still the best value console on the market with a wide range of new releases and value titles to support it."

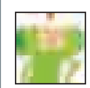


OUR TWO CENTS

Despite David Yarnton trying to convince us that the GameCube is a thriving console with a "wide range of new releases", it's clear the GameCube is flagging badly in the UK, with the Xbox and PS2 both outselling it by considerable margins. Despite this, Nintendo has a rosy future ahead of it. With the DS performing so well, even with the threat of Sony's PSP just around the corner, Nintendo has shown once again it can create and deliver a handheld that gives fans what they want. Factor in the wireless connectivity of Nintendo's upcoming Revolution hardware and what you have is a partnership of which the Game Boy Advance and GameCube can only dream, and something we're really looking forward to seeing in action. With the PlayStation3 also expected to boast similar connectivity benefits with the PSP who knows how far handheld and console partnerships will go?

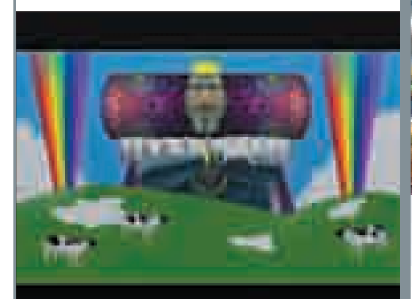
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BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



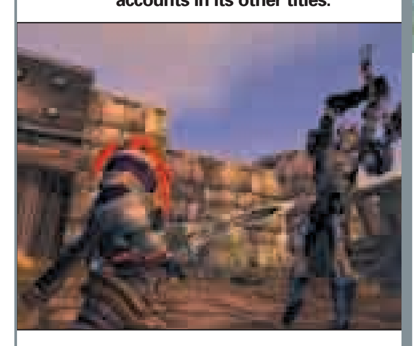
KATAMARI'S ON A ROLL

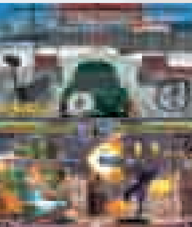
Even though PAL gamers missed out on the original, it's been confirmed that the sequel to Namco's quirky PS2 title *Katamari Damashii* will be released in Europe in 2005. Despite being a great game, *Katamari* was deemed unsuitable for a European release by Namco, as it was thought the simple gameplay wouldn't suit our tastes. But thanks to the importers out there this view has been changed and we'll be joining in with the fun when the new game launches sometime in the next year.



CHEATERS NEVER PROSPER

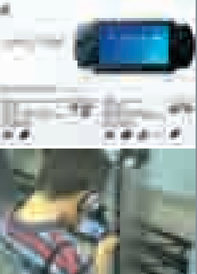
Blizzard Entertainment, developer of MMORPG *World Of Warcraft*, is living up to its 'hard man' reputation by deleting the accounts of gamers thought to be cheating. Anyone who suspects another player of using unfair means to gain the advantage is being encouraged to email hacks@blizzard.com, so they can get their boys to 'sort' the problem. Blizzard is famed for its zero-tolerance approach to cheating and has deleted accounts in its other titles.





The low price has come as a surprise to some gamers.

Is Sony doubting the power of the PlayStation brand?



Limited availability of the PSP could disappoint punters.



SONY PLAYS

CAUTIOUS SONY TAKES TENTATIVE STEPS WITH NEW HANDHELD

As we go to press, the launch of the PlayStation Portable is almost upon us, but the focus has shifted from the hardware itself to Sony's softly-softly approach. Only 200,000 PSPs are expected in the initial shipment – well below the amount needed to cover the anticipated demand.

Surprisingly, Sony has actually admitted that it is treading lightly with the PSP, with SCE spokesman Kenichi Fukunaga clarifying the company's position on the low shipment numbers. "We are being very careful about this project," Fukunaga said. "We did not want to have lots of PSPs on inventory."

Many have intimated that Sony's apprehension is due to the low price of the handheld, which is currently ¥19,800 (about £185). This may be an attempt to compete with Nintendo's DS, but it would see Sony make a sizeable loss on each unit. However, the company is confident that the low price will help win support from the development community, with Fukunaga insisting that, "At that price, software houses should be encouraged to create great titles." That said, predictions of the handheld becoming profitable in several years will not be welcome news for Sony following reports from Nintendo suggesting the DS may pay dividends as early as next year.

It appears that the disappointing shipment figures have only brought Sony more negative news from analysts – something that couldn't have come at a worse time, given the recent financial setback brought about by risk analysis and ratings company Standard & Poor's. The firm, in a move that the *Financial Times* has described as "an embarrassment" for Sony, has downgraded Sony's credit rating from A+ to A; a reduction that could affect the company's ability to secure finances in the future.

The drop comes following a series of disappointing results for Sony, not least its second-quarter financial results that saw an 83 per cent drop in operating profit for the electronics business unit, and Japanese consumers' apathy towards the PSX, which was pushed by Sony to be one of its leading products in 2004.

"Sony has been undergoing major restructuring efforts to reduce fixed costs

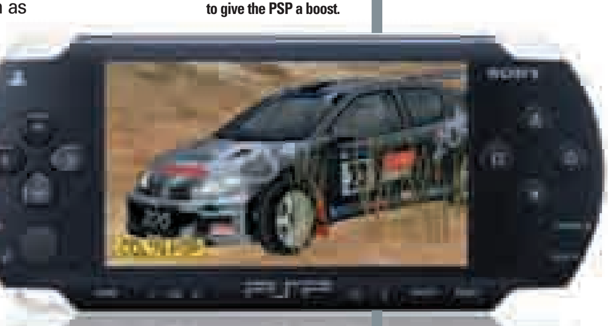


"SONY'S EFFORTS TO BUILD ITS PORTFOLIO, INCLUDING AUDIO/VISUAL PRODUCTS, HAVE LAGGED BEHIND AN INCREASINGLY COMPETITIVE MARKET"
OSAMU KOBAYASHI, ANALYST

IT SAFE

and increase its overall competitiveness," said Osamu Kobayashi, analyst at Standard & Poor's. "However, Sony's efforts to strengthen its product portfolio, including audio/visual products – a traditional strength for Sony – have lagged behind in an increasingly competitive market characterised by aggressive development and marketing of new products."

No doubt the low price for the PSP, almost half what was expected, will fail to inspire confidence in the firm's profitability, although at least the spread of launch titles for the machine will ensure its success. Around 20 titles have been confirmed for release before the end of 2004, with key games such as *Ridge Racers*, *Vampire Chronicle: The Chaos Tower*, *Dynasty Warriors* and *Metal Gear Acid* all expected within a week of the launch. This, combined with promises that another 300,000 PSPs will arrive in shops by early January, suggests Sony's chances in the handheld market may be more promising than they seem.



Big-name games such as *Colin McRae Rally* are expected to give the PSP a boost.

CHARITY BEGINS AT HOME

The hardware might have been in short supply, but there was plenty of generosity going round thanks to an auction held the week before the official 12 December launch. Japanese retailer Rakuten, supported by Sony, held the auction and sold off PSP Value Packs (containing a handheld and accessories such as a memory card, headphones and a carry pouch) to 500 lucky customers ahead of the launch, with all the proceeds going to a charity fund set up for victims of the Niigata earthquake that hit northern Japan in late October.





NOT ANOTHER...

PHANTOM STORY

VAPOURWARE COMPANY RUNS INTO EVEN DEEPER TROUBLE

From suspicious hoax to actual product and back again – the development of Infinium Labs' Phantom console has hit another snag: the company now needs new funding before it can launch the machine early next year. The release, which was scheduled for November 2004 before being shunted back to Q2 2005, is now looking even more unlikely unless Infinium can raise an additional $11.5 million, according to a regulatory filing posted by the company last month. Even worse, the filing shows Infinium has made a net loss of $27.25 million since being founded in 2002, with liabilities of $10.69 million as of the end of September – not bad for a firm that hasn't even launched its product yet.

However, the company is also facing a lawsuit from investment bank SBI, which has claimed that Infinium owes it money based on financing and advice supplied by the firm. Not surprisingly, Infinium's CEO Tim Roberts has fervently denied the allegations, claiming that "Infinium terminated its agreement with SBI" after the investment firm failed to generate any backing for Infinium; something that seems strangely at odds with a press release issued in January 2004, stating that SBI-Brightline (an affiliate of SBI) was set to plough $15 million into development of the Phantom.

The claim is yet another act in what has become a comedy of errors for the Florida-based company, compounding our suspicion that the Phantom will never see the light of day.

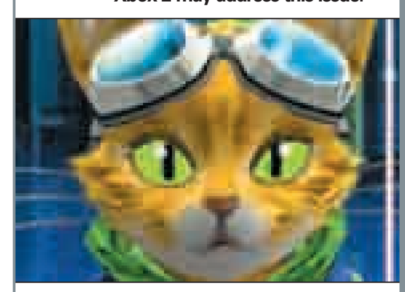
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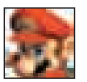
BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



ARTOON PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

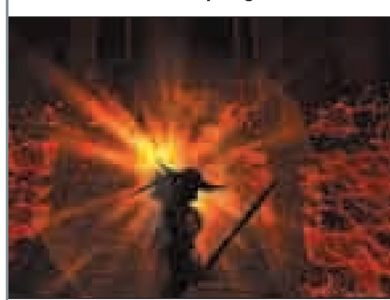
Japanese developer Artoon has revealed that it is about to begin work on a 3D role-playing game for one of the next-generation consoles. The studio has just released *Blinx 2: Masters Of Time And Space*, and with that title out of the way it can look to the future. Very little is known about the game at this stage and the actual format the title will appear on hasn't been announced, but the company's close relationship with Microsoft tends to suggest that it is likely to be for the Xbox 2. The Xbox has lacked RPGs, so Xbox 2 may address this issue.





DS FOLLOWING GROWS

GBA publisher Conspiracy Entertainment has been named as a Nintendo DS platform publisher for North America. This means the firm will find new licences and developers for the DS. "We expect to fully support Nintendo on the new and exciting DS platform," said Sirus Ahmadi, president and CEO of Conspiracy, which has developed *Enclave* on the PC and *Rally Championship* on the Cube. "The DS is a great new portable gaming system with so many opportunities, and we are so happy to be involved at such an early stage."



CONSOLE SHORTAGES REPORTED AS DEMAND SOARS

ALL I WANTED FOR CHRISTMAS...

■ Xboxes and PS2s were in short supply. Plenty of Cubes were available though…

It was an unhappy Christmas for many gamers as console shortages saw some shops running out of stock. Retailers around the world didn't have enough PlayStation2s to meet demand, and US shops were unable to find enough Xboxes. Europe is believed to have been the worst hit, with stores running out of various consoles before Christmas.

Unfulfilled demand in Europe and the US led to bidding wars on internet auction sites as people were prepared to pay over the odds to secure a console for Christmas. This shortage is believed to be the direct result of Sony's questionable sales strategies throughout the summer. In order to clear the shelves in preparation for the new slimline PStwo, the company slowed distribution of the PS2. This created a huge sales surge for both machines when the PStwo was launched – many retailers sold out of their first shipments within a matter of days.

"Consumer demand for the new PlayStation2 has exceeded our expectations," admitted an SCEA spokesperson in December, "and we are doing all we can to fulfil the wish lists of people who want a new PlayStation2 unit under their trees this holiday season."

A Sony representative in Japan announced in November that the firm was keeping the production of the PSP handheld system low in order to focus more strongly on producing the PlayStation2 console. It's a good plan in theory, but as the shortage continues it's one that doesn't seem to be working very well.

Microsoft was said to be benefiting from Sony's failure to fulfil demand, but in reality the situation isn't going so well for Sony's main rival either. American retailers have revealed that their Xbox stock was starting to run worryingly short, while Nick Grange of Microsoft UK admitted that there has been "high demand" for the Xbox. Grange attributed the shortages to the popularity of *Halo 2* and the Interactive World Cup, as well as the Xbox's sub-£100 price. "We are working hard to address this temporary issue," he said.

It's probably safe to assume that Nintendo's stock rooms are nice and full of GameCubes…

GIVE US A BREAK, WE CAN'T BE GREAT ALL THE TIME…

IT'S A HARD LIFE

Our decision not to review 'game of the year' *Half-Life 2* was a difficult one and has led to accusations of laziness, pettiness or downright stupidity being levelled at games™. So we feel we should explain…

The absence of a review of Valve's long-awaited sequel was due to several things, the main being the fact that we didn't receive playable code until the game was already in the shops. Although this wouldn't usually prevent us from reviewing such a big title, the positioning of our deadline dates meant we would have been reviewing the game not only long after its UK release date, but also after several other magazines had already reported on how good it was.

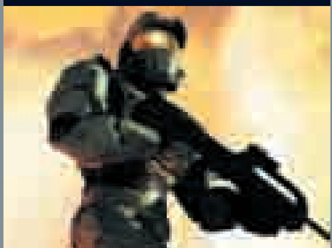
This isn't some petty attempt to get one up on the publisher who didn't give us the code, as that wouldn't be very mature, would it? Instead, we decided that dedicating up to four pages to a game that most of our readers would already own would have been a waste of space – space that we could have filled with interesting information and articles (like this explanation, for example).

Sure, we apologise for the lack of a review, but it's just one of those things that can't be helped. Just so you all know, we've played *Half-Life 2* lots and it's very good. Now please, let that be the end of it.



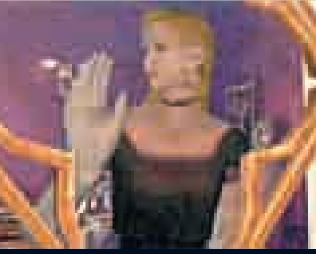
games™ THE TOP FIVE

VIDEOGAME SPOILERS



No.5 HALO 2

Where's the rest of the ending?



No.4 RESIDENT EVIL: CODE VERONICA

Hey… it's a man in a wig!



No.3 METAL GEAR SOLID 2

Snake's dead – long live Raiden



No.2 KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

Oh, so *I'm* the bad guy. Right.



No.1… FINAL FANTASY VII

Aeris dies. Bummer.



UP THE WORKERS

EA FACES COURT ACTION FROM ANGRY EMPLOYEES

Electronic Arts may have brought joy to thousands of gamers, but it's having problems keeping its staff happy. It's already been at the centre of one controversy after the partner of a burnt-out employee posted details of EA's long-hours culture on an internet forum. Now the firm is facing a lawsuit brought by its employees and, according to a leaked memo, is seriously rethinking some of its policies, most notably the classification of overtime eligibility.

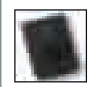
After starting as a simple frustrated rant on a forum, this story has resulted in EA facing a class action lawsuit from employees on the grounds that the company incorrectly classified a number of its staff as being exempt from overtime under Californian employment law. San Francisco law firm Schubert and Reed LLP has taken the case and in a statement lawyer Robert Schubert explained: "We are seeking unpaid overtime for a good number of [EA] employees who weren't [properly] paid… EA contends they were exempt – we contend otherwise."

As a result of this, it would appear EA may be altering the way it operates, with a leaked memo from EA senior vice president of human resources Rusty Rueff pointing towards changes, specifically with regards to overtime payment. "We are looking to reclassify some jobs as overtime eligible in the new fiscal year," Rueff said in his memo, adding: "We experiment, we learn from our mistakes, we adapt and we grow."

While things may well be looking up for EA employees, we wonder how this is going to affect the rest of the industry. Will staff at smaller developers also demand overtime for additional hours, or perhaps shorter hours and bigger development teams? If so, will smaller developers lacking big titles be able to find the extra cash? Regardless of what happens, it's clear a new line between dedication and exploitation is waiting to be drawn.

Data Stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



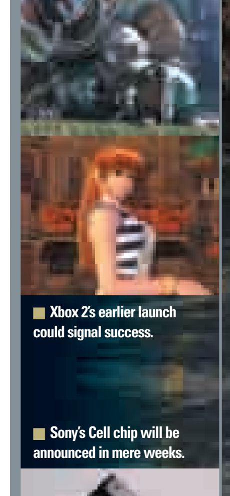
SONY'S CHRISTMAS CRACKER

After sending demo discs to its US PlayStation Underground fan club, Sony was forced to apologise when the disc wiped gamers' memory cards. It seems the problem was caused by the *Viewtiful Joe 2* demo, with PS2 owners keen to sample Capcom's latest game suffering at the hands of a glitch that formatted their memory cards. Sony is now offering PS2 owners a free game. Titles available include *ATV Offroad Fury 3* and *Hot Shots Golf Fore!* Which is hardly compensation for 80 hours of *San Andreas*…



NO SECOND POSTAL

The Office Of Film and Literature Classification in New Zealand has banned Running With Scissors' controversial *Postal 2* after a year-long investigation into the game. It's now illegal to own or sell the title, with fines and even prison sentences the penalties for those who handle the game. *Postal 2* isn't the first game to be banned in New Zealand – last year, *Manhunt* was outlawed down under months before it was attacked by the tabloids in the UK.



Xbox 2's earlier launch could signal success.

Sony's Cell chip will be announced in mere weeks.



FUTURE PERFECT?

NEXT-GENERATION TECHNOLOGY ONLY MONTHS AWAY AS RIVALRIES SWELL

News that Sony and partners IBM and Toshiba are to unveil the Cell chip – reportedly the technology at the core of the PlayStation3 – in February should herald the first firm information on the new console. The International Solid State Circuits Conference has been chosen for the grand unveiling, taking place in San Francisco on 9 February. Once the chip is finalised and made public, development for the PlayStation3 – still expected to launch in early 2006 – can really get underway.

Meanwhile, Microsoft is winning more support for Xbox 2 by apparently being rather more supportive of prospective developers. "There's not much information from Sony," Tecmo boss Junji Nakamura explained during his firm's half-yearly results conference. "The situation with Microsoft is very different." With the proposed earlier release of the Xbox 2 (it's due in 2005), you'd expect development kits and information to be rather more plentiful, but even so, getting off the starting blocks earlier appears to be swaying favour Microsoft's way, even in its weakest territory. In fact, the American giant appears to be doing a great job of convincing Japan that its next console will be the one to back. "Microsoft should be able to use its experience of the current machine's failure to succeed, even in Japan," Nakamura said.

The Tecmo chief also questioned the logic behind the Cell technology. "The CPU was developed for a next-generation game machine, but the hardware is conceived by an appliance manufacturer," he told the conference. "I feel that [Sony is] probably trying to use games as a way to increase its power in the home appliance industry."

It'll be at least February before we get our first glimpse of Sony's latest technology (with E3 hopefully granting us a more in-depth insight) but the guaranteed PlayStation foothold appears to be eroding.

Sony can't help but be troubled by this. The Xbox 2 will have the massive advantage of being the first next-gen machine on sale, and as even long-term supporters of the PlayStation question their allegiances – due, in part, to developers wanting to jump on board Xbox 2's earlier launch – it's important that Sony doesn't rely on brand familiarity. Else it could find itself playing second fiddle to the successor to the increasingly popular Xbox.

LEGAL WIN FOR VALVE BUT PIRACY MARS HALF-LIFE 2 LAUNCH

HOLLOW VICTORY

Valve has won a court case against *Half-Life 2* publisher Vivendi Universal Games. Filed in August 2002, the case alleged that Sierra On-Line (now VU Games) had breached a contract with Valve by placing some of the developer's titles in internet cafes around the world.

"We're happy the court has affirmed the meaning of our publishing contract," Valve boss Gabe Newell revealed in an official statement. "This is good news for Valve and its cyber café partners around the world." No damages have been decided yet and this is just one of several allegations made by both Valve and Vivendi, so further cases may be filed.

However, despite the successful launch of *Half-Life 2*, after a development process dogged by code leaks and legal issues, Valve is still facing problems with piracy.

Over 20,000 *Half-Life 2* accounts were suspended within weeks of the game's launch after gamers used illegal keys to activate the accounts. It's the largest single swoop of its kind, but anti-piracy work will continue.

Half-Life 2 launched in November and entered the UK multiformat sales charts at number three. Of course, chart sales didn't take into account the many copies that were undoubtedly sold via Valve's Steam website, but as of yet, the developer hasn't released any details on this.

CLIMAX CHANGE

BOOM TIME FOR UK/US DEVELOPER

Climax is rapidly establishing itself as one of the industry's foremost developers following a series of expansions and mergers. The latest move will see the relocation of the company's Los Angeles studio as well as a recruitment drive. Climax LA is to move to larger offices, and 80 staff are to be hired once the studio is up and running.

"The expansion is crucial to the studio's ongoing development," said David Schwartz, president of Climax LA. "We're particularly excited by the opportunities this move gives us to create the next generation of hit games for Xbox 2 and PlayStation3."

Next-generation development is clearly Climax's priority now, as in November three of its UK studios were merged to create Climax Action, Britain's largest single studio. Climax Handheld, London and Solent were brought together to focus on making 'multi-genre-action' games for Xbox 2 and PS3.

Simon Gardner, president of Climax Action, says the merger will let the studio make the successful transition to the next generation of hardware. "By combining one team's experience with first-person shooters with the other team's expertise in third-person and vehicle games, we've created a studio that is geared up to produce truly outstanding action games," he said.



SEPARATED AT BIRTH

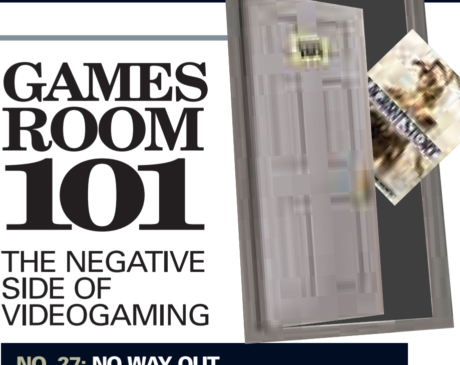
games™ tracks down those videogame lookalikes

One that perhaps should have appeared a long time ago, although we're more concerned now thanks to the DS's 'rubbing' abilities. Mario and porn legend Ron Jeremy – think of the possibilities. Ewww.



GAMES ROOM 101

THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF VIDEOGAMING



NO. 27: NO WAY OUT

Pac-Man, eh? After raiding our games collections, we've come to the conclusion that the hungry little chap has a lot to answer for. No, we're not talking about club culture. We're referring, of course, to mazes and, moreover, their frequently lazy and annoying use in games even to this day. Now don't get us wrong – we're fully aware that without the fusion of topiary labyrinths and digital entertainment we'd be without *Super Monkey Ball* and the sprawling dungeons of the *Zelda* series (among others), but at the same time, you don't expect to be stung in the middle of a true RPG…

Case in point: *Vagrant Story*. Square's classic was, for the most part, a solid adventure that was so far beyond hardcore it wasn't even funny. But all was well until you reached the Snowfly Forest, the perfect example of when mazes go bad. You see, some bright spark once decided that traditional mazes had become too staid and that the way to improve them would be warps. Choose the wrong exit and who knows where you'll end up – teleported back to the start, perhaps? In a seemingly endless string of identical rooms? Whatever the outcome, you can be sure that frustration won't be far away.

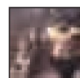


Good mazes: Even though he can't see where he's going, Pac-Man still rocks.

Bad mazes: Enter the forest and kiss a few hours of your life goodbye.

Data stream

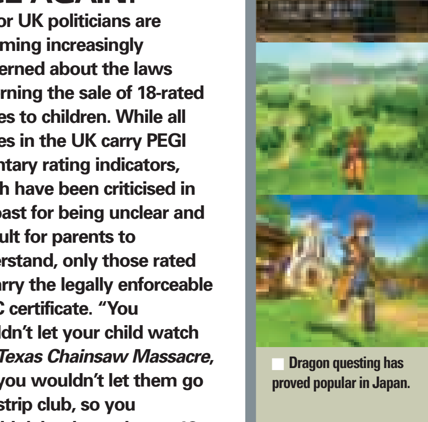
BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



WHAT'S MY AGE AGAIN?

Senior UK politicians are becoming increasingly concerned about the laws governing the sale of 18-rated games to children. While all games in the UK carry PEGI voluntary rating indicators, which have been criticised in the past for being unclear and difficult for parents to understand, only those rated 18 carry the legally enforceable BBFC certificate. "You wouldn't let your child watch *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, and you wouldn't let them go to a strip club, so you shouldn't let them play an 18-rated game – it's the same principle," said Culture, Sport and Media Secretary Tessa Jowell. "Adults can make their own informed choices, but children can't always and need to be protected."





Dragon questing has proved popular in Japan.

SQUARE ENIX SAVES THE DAY IN JAPAN

STRONG SALES OF DRAGON QUEST GAME REJUVENATE JAPANESE MARKET

The latest instalment of Square Enix's *Dragon Quest* series has exceeded sales expectations in Japan, combating fears of a market downturn in the region. *Dragon Quest VIII* became Square Enix's fastest selling game ever, shifting 2.2 million copies of the 3 million that were shipped in just three days.

Japan has been in something of a slump recently with many of the big-name titles shifting nowhere near as many units as we would have expected. *The Legend Of Zelda: The Minish Cap* failed to break the 100,000 sales barrier in its first week of release, and other big hitters have also failed to make any sort of dent in the market.

Fortunately, *Dragon Quest VIII*'s sales indicate that the market is on the up again. Another Square Enix title, *Kingdom Hearts: Chains Of Memories*, shifted a respectable 203,000 units in its first week of release, while Banpresto's RPG *Magna Carta* managed to sell nearly 122,000 copies in the same period. In stark contrast to this, Bungie's *Halo 2* was in third place, selling just 37,000 units.

With the recent launch of both the DS and PSP, Japanese gaming looks to be booming again.

BANNED AID

BIG-NAME GAMES FALL FOUL OF THE CENSORS

Ubisoft is not known for courting controversy, yet one of its recent releases has been banned in South Korea. *Ghost Recon 2* was not passed by the South Korean Media Rating Board as the game is set in a not-too-distant version of North Korea that's been ravaged by war. Understandably, considering tense relations between North and South Korea, the game will not be released in either territory.

The North Korean government has already expressed its displeasure with the game. Back in June, before the game was even released, a statement said that, "[Americans] have shown everyone their hatred for us. This may be just a game now, but a war will not be a game for them later."

It's not known whether the ban is permanent or not, though it would cause problems for the PC release of the game early in 2005 if it isn't lifted.

Sports Interactive's *Football Manager 2005* has run into trouble too after China's Ministry of Culture decided the game "posed harm to the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity." How? By representing Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau and Tibet as independent countries, thus violating Chinese law.

Although *Football Manager* has not been officially released in China, it is available via the internet and on bootleg CDs. Internet service providers who don't prevent gamers downloading the game will be fined up to 30,000 yuan (about £1,900).

"say what you see"

Meaningless waffle from the industry

THIS MONTH David Yarnton, Nintendo UK's new boss, scoffs at the lack of PS2 and Xbox hardware on the shelves

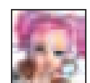
"The shortage of other companies' product is perceived as a sign of success, but it can also be seen as poor planning and forecasting"

games™ says: This in the week when DS handhelds run out in Japan and the US – pot calling the kettle black, perhaps? And don't even get us started on why Nintendo still has plenty of GameCubes…

MORE FROM MR CHIPS NEXT MONTH!



BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



BANDAI FEELS THE BEAT

It's been revealed that former Sega producer Tetsuya Mizuguchi has been appointed to run a new game publishing label at Bandai Q Entertainment. This is great news for fans of audio-focused titles, as Mizuguchi is the man responsible for *Space Channel Five* and *Rez* – two classics in the genre – during his time with Sega. The first two titles to be produced by this new company will be *Lumines* for the PSP and *Meteos* on the Nintendo DS. It's relatively safe to assume those with no rhythm are going to struggle a little with these titles…

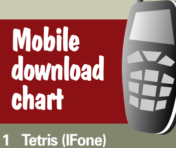




NINTENDO TO HIT THE BIG SCREEN

Nintendo is rumoured to be entering the film business by opening a studio to make animated movies. The idea looks to have come from former company president Hiroshi Yamauchi, who suggested that an animated film based on a collection of classic Japanese poetry should be made. Although Nintendo is already known in the movie world for the Pokémon films, they were created by external companies. For the poetry project, Nintendo aims to run the entire creative process itself.





Mobile download chart

1 Tetris (IFone)
2 3D Pool (Digital Bridges)
3 Pac-Man (Namco)
4 SWAT Sniper (Elkware)
5 Mafia Wars (Sumea)
6 Alpha Wing (Macrospace)
7 Racing Feaver 2 (Sumea)
8 Tiger Woods PGA Tour Golf 2004 (Digital Bridges)
9 Bomberman (Living Mobile)
10 FIFA Football 2004 (Digital Bridges)



Official Mobile Games Java Download Chart © Elspa – Oct 2004

FORMER ARGONAUT STUDIO REVIVED WITH SAN ON BOARD

A LITTLE NINJA MAGIC

As Argonaut's shareholders and administrators continue to sift through the rubble left after the company's collapse, one of the developer's external studios has reappeared under a new moniker. Previously known as Just Add Monsters, the Cambridge-based studio, which was bought out by Argonaut's former CEO Jez San under circumstances that have been labelled suspicious by the firm's shareholders, now goes by the name of Ninja Theory, and it seems to be business as usual.

With the rebranding hailed a success, the Just Add Water founders find themselves back at the helm, with Nina Kristensen, Tameem Atoniades and Mike Ball taking on roles as heads of development, design and technology respectively, while San takes a place on the company's board as a non-executive director. The studio has returned to work on *Heavenly Sword*, a next-generation console title that was originally unveiled in early 2004 and was garnering much enthusiasm from the publishing community until the Argonaut unpleasantness.

"We've gone through hell tackling the creative, technological and business challenges of next-gen game development," said Kristensen, "but we've come out of the worst intact and it feels great to be a truly independent company once again."

US MOBILE FIRMS SNAP UP EUROPEAN RIVALS

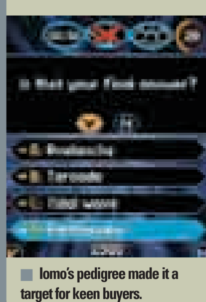
MOBILE YANKS GO SHOPPING

In a big move for the world of mobile development, two US firms have moved in on European territory and bought out two of the continent's most successful developers. After its work with brands such as *Tomb Raider*, *Colin McRae* and *Tiger Woods*, the purchase of developer Iomo should come as no surprise, although few would have expected US wireless content distributor InfoSpace to step in with $15 million to clinch the deal.

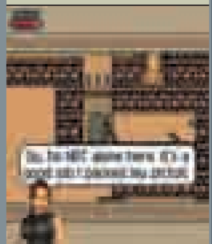
"As a company, we have been fortunate to work with several major mobile operators and leading handset manufacturers," said John Chasey, Iomo's managing director. "Now, we are looking forward to taking our relationships, products and expertise to the next level with InfoSpace."

While the Iomo deal is significant, however, the one that has raised more eyebrows is the purchase of European developer Macrospace by US rival and mobile game publisher Sorrent, as it has led to the creation of one of the biggest global companies in the mobile phone industry. The deal, the financial terms of which have yet to be revealed, brings together a whole wealth of brands under one roof including Cartoon Network, Eidos, Atari, Fox Sports and Square Enix.

"Macrospace is one of the most highly regarded mobile gaming companies in Europe and is a true culture fit with Sorrent," said the firm's CEO, Greg Ballard. "The company has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to quality."



Iomo's pedigree made it a target for keen buyers.



WHAT KIND OF A MAN NOT ONLY FANTASISES ABOUT BEAUTIFUL WOMEN MUD WRESTLING IN BIKINIS, BUT THEN MAKES A GAME ABOUT IT? GAMES™ TRIES TO FIND OUT BY INVITING ONE OF KONAMI'S TOP PRODUCERS TO PUT 'EM ON THE GLASS…



"IF A GAME GETS TOO SERIOUS OR ERRATIC IT BECOMES EMBARRASSING FOR YOU TO PLAY – YOU WANT TO BE ABLE TO LAUGH AND HAVE FUN"

AKIRA UCHIDA, PRODUCER, KONAMI

AKIRA UCHIDA

KONAMI

When you do a one-to-one interview, preparation is key – research has to be done, questions need to be tailored and every precaution should be taken to ensure you don't go in cold. In the case of interviewing Akira Uchida, however, we're unsure what to expect. Konami's PR describe him as 'eccentric and mysterious', while the fact that he's responsible for *Rumble Roses* (the bikini-wearing, mud-wrestling catfight-'em-up that's causing a furore in the US) speaks volumes. We're a little worried; if only because the possibility of talking to the games industry equivalent of Peter Stringfellow scares the bejesus out of us.

Thankfully, the truth is rather less fantastical – looking every bit the laidback producer, Uchida seems no different from many other Japanese industry types we've met… bar the penchant for buxom female wrestlers, perhaps. But even that seems to be perfectly justifiable, considering the man's stance on other genres. "I personally don't like games about war that seem to be popular at the moment, or games that exploit weakness," he says. "These are things that should be seen as a problem and need to be dealt with, as they're becoming far too similar to the things we see on television. Sexually themed games, however, aren't anywhere near that level yet; they're just starting out and haven't reached maturity yet, so I'd like to be seen as a leader in that genre."

That genre, of course, has been around for a while – fuzzy memories spring to mind of adolescents huddled round a monitor, giggling at *Sam Fox's Strip Poker* – and now they can see all the flesh they want in all its polygon-textured glory. *Playboy: The Mansion*, *Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude*, even the hideous *Singles*… these games are driving the mainstream march for erotic entertainment, with *Rumble Roses* leading the charge like a scantily clad Joan of Arc.

"Our basic aim was to appeal to both the gamer who likes looking at beautiful women and gamers who like playing more traditional wrestling games but are bored of playing yet another sequel," says Uchida. "Market-wise though, we didn't want to put any particular emphasis on one country – wrestling games are very popular in the US, but we also wanted to appeal to the Japanese and European markets as well. In this way, we tried to create something for everybody; the characters have a typical manga style to them, plus they're attractive and can fight. It's a fusion of lots of different things."

Certainly, the combination of women, fighting and, er, mud has a wide appeal, even if it does seem rather stereotypical to target the 'lonely' male gamer. Mercifully, the game is also fun to play – that developer Yukes is an old hand in the world of ring-based combat meant that more time could be dedicated to perfecting the presentation rather than refining what was already a solid, if somewhat tweaked game engine. (Uchida admits that around 70 per cent of the development time and costs went into honing the character models because "the breast and butt are important in the expression of women figures".)

However, while *Rumble Roses*' unique concept gives it an edge over more traditional fighting titles ("There is no competition with other fighting games like *Tekken* or *Smackdown!*, because we have a pretty new concept," Uchida says) it's interesting to see that Uchida himself is one of the few Japanese producers we've met who doesn't think originality is the be all and end all of development. "If a game has originality then it'll obviously stand out from the crowd, but just creating originality isn't a way to guarantee success," he says. "Instead, it's often better to take well-understood concepts and do them in a different way, so that people can enjoy something new without it feeling completely unfamiliar."

For a man with a thing for voluptuous women, it's a remarkably rational answer. But with *Rumble Roses* out of the way, what is Uchida thinking of doing next? "The idea of creating a stealth game like *Metal Gear Solid* or *Splinter Cell* really appeals to me," he says, grinning. With women with big breasts? "Of course!" Hmm. Perhaps the Peter Stringfellow analogy wasn't so far off the mark…

Rumble Roses *is out now for PS2 on import. It will get a PAL release in 2005.*



LETTER FROM AMERICA

WITH YOUR FRIENDLY EX-PATRIOT, THE SHAPE

"GAMES OFTEN PROCLAIMED BY REVIEWERS TO LAST A MERE TEN ME WEEKS OR EVEN MONTHS TO COMPLETE.

The side of Mrs Shape that dare not speak its name.

Here's something that's not fun to learn about yourself: you're rubbish. Sadly this is the inescapable truth I met with this month. Here's how…

By now, you might have picked up that I get excited about military things. I'm no right-wing warmonger, but there's something fascinating about flash bangs, night vision, suppressors and their tactical brethren. Anyone familiar with the Amiga scene will know what I mean when I say I'm a bit Cam Winstanley, so I tend to follow the release of modern combat titles closely.

Ubisoft, of whom it seems we should expect no wrong these days, surprised me and thousands of other weapons fetishists with the sudden announcement in early November that the Xbox version of *Ghost Recon 2* would be shipping two weeks early in the US. This gave me a good couple of weeks' head start on my homeland buddies to get through the single-player campaign before they got hooked up and the online battling commenced, something of a luxury as the endangered experience of offline play lists painfully on the back seat. And so I set about it.

Not the most forgiving of games, *Ghost Recon 2* teaches you early on that anything you leave exposed is likely to get shot. A little past halfway through the game I arrived at an impasse, as is nearly always the case with me, where the developer's ideals regarding how skilled one should have become by a certain stage eclipse my actual abilities. In this example I had to travel through dense woods thick with Charlie to rescue a downed chopper pilot, meet him at the crash site and escort him safely to an extraction point. I couldn't even reach the pilot, which you'll have noticed is the first action of any consequence required by the level.

In need of some comic relief, I was able after much coaxing to convince Mrs Shape to have a go, rousing the poor soul from one of those incredibly dull looking library books that, despite the warning, you just can't help judging by its cover. Mrs Shape, who only ever plays *Morrowind* and likes the Y-axis inverted whereas I do not, took the task on with much humour and self-deprecation. She led her squad uninjured to the smouldering aircraft, rendezvoused with the pilot amid heavy fire, paused to fire one shot into a man's head when he posed an immediate threat, and made off through sniper-infested forests toward the extraction point – the end of the mission – getting three quarters of the way before finally running afoul of some North Koreans who by this point were likely as gobsmacked as I. It was clear that one more go would have sealed it. All this, despite the up-and-down being



OR 15 HOURS WILL GENERALLY TAKE CLEARLY, I JUST DON'T MEASURE UP"

reversed from her preference and my condescending twittering in one ear throughout. Indubitable evidence, I believe, that I am rubbish.

Not two weeks prior, I'd played for **games™** stablemate *XBM* in an organised clan game of *Halo 2* against self-confessed 'worst clan on Live', the Brotherhood of X, and barely escaped with enough pride to continue leaving the house, having suffered catastrophic defeat. Come to think of it, cola-breathing, pre-teen American children almost invariably crush me on the soil of Zanzibar and elsewhere too. I can meet them, fire just as many shots from the same gun, yet I will die. It's like their guns work better. I like to tell myself they were cheating.

Games often proclaimed by spunky online reviewers to last, say, a miserable ten or 15 hours will generally take me weeks or even months to complete. Granted I'm the type to check every room, search under every staircase, try every door, toy with dead bodies rather than rush ahead… but that can't be it. I don't measure up. Still, games are entertainment, and if you enjoy them then I suppose it doesn't really matter where you rate on the scale.

It's probably for the best if I spend a little more gaming time offline, where one's skills are not thrown into such sharp relief against the hardcore. And obviously see to it that Mrs Shape never again strays from casting spells in *Morrowind*.

Many thanks



MISS ABOUT BRITAIN…

Decent Chicken Tikka Masala



LOVE ABOUT AMERICA…

Real Broadband



GOT ANY QUESTIONS FOR THE SHAPE? THEN JUST DROP HIM A LINE AT: theshape@comcast.net YOU MIGHT GET A REPLY… OR POSSIBLY JUST THE FINGER.

AMERIKAAN

PRODUCTS, PLACES, SERVICES AND EVENTS FROM THE LAND OF THE FREE

RITE AID





By outward appearances a plain old pharmacy but also, as I discovered when drawn to one in Central Station, 'The Cheapest Place on Earth to Buy Candy'. The pharmacy thing is a front for aisles of soul-stirring brand-name confections at third-world prices.

US MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar	PS2
2	Halo 2	Microsoft	Xbox
3	Tony Hawk's Underground 2	Activision	PS2
4	WWE Smackdown! Vs RAW	THQ	PS2
5	Ace Combat 5: The Unsung War	SCEA	PS2
6	Conflict: Vietnam	SCi	PS2
7	The SpongeBob Squarepants Movie	THQ	PS2
8	Star Wars Battlefront	LucasArts	Xbox
9	Madden NFL 2005	EA Sports	PS2
10	Killzone	SCEA	PS2

(Updated 1/12/04)


GTA: San Andreas

Halo 2



KONGETSU*

WITH JAPANESE CORRESPONDENT TIM ROGERS

"I DIDN'T WANT MY GUEST TO BUY ALL THOSE MEGA DRIVES FROM I DIDN'T WANT THE STAFF TO THINK OF ME AS AN ACCOMPLICE

About two weeks ago I was in Akihabara when I came across the front of a little second-floor loft shop that specialises in foreign games. By 'foreign games', I mean US PlayStation and Xbox games, or else the Korean and Taiwanese versions of the newest games priced less than half their Japanese counterparts. These games work on Japanese PS2s and are in Japanese, with a Chinese/English instruction card tucked behind the manual.

This store is not popular, and I'm only halfway sure why. All the speculating in the world, however, can't get me past what was going on there that day two weeks ago: out in front of the store a television was set up, and a mob was crowded around it. I immediately assumed it was a trailer of that new *Gundam* game that was drawing silent, mouth-breathing swarms all down the Electric City Strip. And then I heard a shout: "DUDE, STEAL THAT TRAIN!"

I squeezed in and noticed a Japanese man three times my size playing *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* like a little kid plays a toy piano. He was in an underground train station when a train glided in, and he took it. Soon, the mob was cheering. The train was grinding out of the station under the orange sunlight. The wheels sparked. Then the train hit a curve and rolled off the tracks before landing in a lake. The player jumped out of the train and pulled himself up onto the top of the train like a superhero, eliciting more cheers.

"CAN YOU SWIM?" And then he swam to shore.

My companion, a tall foreign man from a country that is neither yours nor mine, shrugged. "Ooh, so you can swim. Big deal. I'll never understand these games."

This swarthy man had, just 15 minutes earlier, threatened to kiss me for showing him the only place in Tokyo where you can find Sega Mega Drive units in-box, new, for under ¥7,000. In fact, they're only ¥5,000 at Suehirocho's Furenzu. I showed him they had six units, and he scratched his beard and said, "You think they'll let me buy all six?" And I said, "Uh… no." He wants these consoles to sell on eBay. I asked him if he'd ever seen an old Hong Kong kung-fu movie.

"What kind of question is that?"

"Well, did you? Jackie Chan – or someone – is a folk hero in Hong Kong at the turn of the 20th Century, and he has to stop the British punks taking jade imperial seals and calligraphic scrolls because they think they'd look nice in their bathrooms. There's always a showdown on the boat at the end. The folk hero prevents the evil westerner from stealing Chinese culture."

"This isn't China."

"You get the idea. This is the only store in Akihabara I care about. I like the way the woman at the counter is always



TEACH YOURSELF JAPANESE

LESSON TWENTY SEVEN	ORDERING YOUR POSSE OF GANGSTAS
Ano kyuukyuusha wo nusume!	Steal that ambulance!
Ano obaasan wo buttobashitemite!	Run over that old lady!
Orire! Enjin wa bakuhatsu shisou!	Get out! The engine is about to explode!
Ano tsujigimi wo naguttemite!	Try punching that prostitute!
Abunai! Tsujigimi wa kenjuu motteru zo!	Look out! That prostitute's carrying a pistol!

MY FAVOURITE GAME STORE. TO SOME CULTURE THEFT”

cleaning Famicom cartridges. I don't want them to think of me as an accomplice to culture theft.”

The guy bought one Mega Drive.

A week later, I was playing my own copy of *San Andreas* with a Japanese game producer we'll call ‘Sensei’. Sensei did not play *San Andreas*, he merely watched, and insisted: “This game is intelligent and clever; yet it lacks polish. It has freedom; yet it lacks liberty. Were I to make such a game I would make it more restricted. You have to pay for your first car, for example. You can't kill just anyone. Your character is not a blank slate. He has reasons he cannot kill just anyone. That sort of thing. This is how the Japanese people would make such a game.”

“Yet I saw them enjoying it in Akihabara as it is.”

“I do not doubt you.” For the record, he did not, really, doubt me. It was only I who started to doubt myself. Everything is as it was, and it was exactly as it is.

Kind regards



JAPANESE ONLY

At Sensei's recommendation, I went to a Nintendo DS event. I played many games, including *Nintendogs*, *Meteos* (actually quite brilliant, unlike *Lumines* for PSP), and *Harvest Moon* (the ‘shear a sheep with the stylus’ mini-games get old even during a five-minute demo). Sensei said of the DS that, “I imagine games that exploit the stylus as a cheap gimmick will die out within a year. Soon, we will see games that use the touch screen merely as a simplifying device; you select choices in an RPG, for example, in a game where the bottom screen is always a status menu. This is less exciting than shearing a sheep, though it is rather practical.”

Nonetheless, there was one gimmicky game that interested me above others – *Tendo Dokuta*, an adventure game by Spike. It looks inspired by the lawyer simulation *Gyakuten Saiban*, only it takes place in a hospital and the main character is a doctor. The top screen shows your patient's face, and the bottom screen shows their body. Using the stylus, you make surgical cuts or drag and drop medicines. I waited in line half an hour to play it, only to be told when I finally got to the demo station, “ONLY CAN ENJOY IF READ JAPANESE!” The young man who said this put his hands into a big ‘X’.

I stood there and read the game aloud for ten minutes, then went and played more *Nintendogs*. I couldn't help thinking of the mob yelling commands at the player in Akihabara. Only now, it was… different. Japanesely different.

JAPANESE MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Momotaro Railway USA	Hudson	PS2
2	Naruto 3	Tomy	GC
3	Mario Party 6	Nintendo	GC
4	DragonBall: Advance Adventure	Banpresto	GBA
5	WE 8: Asia Championship	Konami	PS2
6	KH: Chain Of Memories	Square Enix	GBA
7	Magnacarta	Banpresto	PS2
8	Pop 'N' Music 10	Konami	PS2
9	Legend Of Zelda: The Minish Cap	Nintendo	GBA
10	Mario Tennis	Nintendo	GC


Kingdom Hearts: Chain Of Memories

Zelda: The Minish Cap

Mario Party 6

HE'S ONE OF THE MOST REVERED GAMES PRODUCERS IN THE WORLD AND THE FATHER OF METAL GEAR. HIDEO KOJIMA MAKES TIM ROGERS REALISE THAT WE'RE REALLY NOT WORTHY…






KONAMI

HIDEO KOJIMA

Just as *Metal Gear Solid 2* is really an elaborate simulation of the original *Metal Gear Solid*, meant to test its protagonist, this entire interview is constructed with the goal of getting Hideo Kojima to let me try on his glasses.

Those glasses are legendary on the internet, where Kojima is something of a legend himself. Kojima, producer of the *Metal Gear Solid* series, is idolised by gamers, and though many of them disagree on what the hell is happening in some of his more recent games' plots, everyone agrees that his glasses are probably the greatest glasses ever. Some say Kojima had the *Metal Gear Solid* character artist Yoji Shinkawa design them, others say the glasses can be folded into an egg shape, which can then be dropped off a 50-storey building and bounce ten storeys. I ask him where he got them.

Kojima stirs in his big, red, poly-leather chair. It's warm outside and we're in a bright little apartment in a wide, dark, residential building just outside the Konami offices in the $10 billion Roppongi Hills office building complex. He pinches the right transparent arm of the eyeglass frames with his forefinger and thumb, and launches into a story.

Well, he says, the Konami offices used to be in Ebisu, where there's an eyeglass boutique called Hakusan. He bought the glasses there about 13 months ago. However, since then, not only have the Konami offices moved to the Roppongi Hills complex, but the glasses shop has gone out of business. There's one more franchise left, though, in Shibuya. Kojima is not sure if the glasses are still sold there. They're last year's model, after all.

If I were to ask Kojima why he picked those glasses, he probably wouldn't insinuate that the glasses didn't seem too popular, even though that's most likely true. He'd probably just say he picked them because they appealed to him at that moment. I say this because a few hours with Kojima would reveal that, like an artist without questioning the art of what he's doing, Kojima performs these feats of coolness, from stirring up internet fanboys with intriguing plot developments, or simply buying neat glasses.

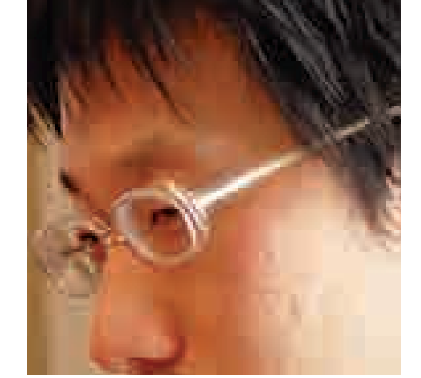
The questioning moves from glasses to hair. Kojima is something of an American pop-culture freak; when the character Solid Snake goes undercover in the second part of *Metal Gear Solid 2* and tells our new hero, Raiden, that his name is Plisskin, anyone who's seen *Escape From New York* will know where the name came from. Kojima has been quite outspoken in the past on the influence of the Kurt Russell character on Solid Snake, and seeing as every little quirk of his games has some place in American pop-culture lore, I figured it was best to ask about Solid Snake's mullet. When was the decision made to use that rat's-nest hairdo?

"Are you implying it's uncool?"

No, no – it's so uncool it's super-cool.

Oh, well, in that case, it was a polygon thing. Snake was blessed with a mullet because the team agreed that he needed to be appealing from behind. In cut-scenes his face needed to be easy to see, but the PS2's increased polygon power was put to good use by making the back of Snake's hair flow as he ran. This meant that the mullet naturally evolved as a part of the game design.

Shigeru Miyamoto's Mario is an example of a character being designed around the limitations of the technology (moustaches are easier to see than mouths, for instance), whereas Kojima's modern-day Snake has







gamesTM THE PLAYERS

been designed to push hardware in ways it doesn't really need to be pushed.

But times have changed. Designers are no longer working with eight-colour sprites; anyone with a Pentium 4 and a good enough instruction manual can create 3D graphics worthy of *Final Fantasy* in a few weeks. When it comes to game concepts, it's up to visionaries like Kojima to layer on a level of careful detail – like a real-time flowing mullet – to keep lesser designers in check.

Sometimes this means going an extra level, incomprehensible to even his own team. For example, when Kojima insisted that Snake's behind be more perfectly rounded than Raiden's, many didn't understand why. Why Snake's butt has to look better than Raiden's, when Raiden's is the one you're going to be looking at for more than half the game, no one understood.

"You have to let your readers know that I'm married, with a son," Kojima says, realising that attention has shifted to a pretty young man in a skintight suit. "Put it in offset, bold, capital text." Kojima holds his hands up, framing the letters.

Lara Croft, heroine of *Tomb Raider*, Kojima elaborates, had a perfectly sculpted rear – the backside was what you saw the most, so Eidos made it look good. "It's something kind of like that," Kojima concludes, about the battle between Snake's and Raiden's asses.

Working with Hideo Kojima must be twice as confusing as interviewing him, and at least half as confusing as playing the endgame of *Metal Gear Solid 2*. The general gist of it, for those who don't know, basically involved Raiden being handed a ninja sword by the thought-to-be-dead-but-not-actually-dead Solid Snake. Before using the sword to dispatch the final boss on the roof of Federal Hall in downtown New York, you single-handedly kill 25 giant robots with a missile launcher, before two hours of radio conversation about the terrorists' true intent (they plan to use a kind of counter-internet technology to censor the way people receive information, robbing them of things like memories carried in transmissions as simple as email).

"LIKE AN ARTIST WITHOUT QUESTIONING THE ART OF WHAT HE'S DOING, KOJIMA PERFORMS FEATS OF COOLNESS"

Many American gamers, the kind who chug root beer while writing college papers and listening to speed metal, were fists-and-teeth-clenched angry at these preposterous story developments. They were probably as angry as they'd been when Napster was shut down – which is ironic, because Kojima says it was while reading an article about the ethics of Napster that the story of *Metal Gear Solid 2* was born. This explanation was far from satisfying for many angry gamers; I asked Kojima why the ending was like it was.

"Because it's a videogame. Videogames are the only medium where you can do something like this. I figured, why ▷

not do it first?" That answer is either super-evasive or super-cool. As I bore witness to the delivery, trust me, it was super-cool.

Many American gamers (the game sold at least twice as many copies in the US as in Japan, after all) claimed Kojima had simply gone off the deep end. In so claiming, they were assuming Kojima alone was responsible for writing the game. I asked him about this, citing a recent interview with famed writer and producer Shigesato Itoi, whose 1993 RPG *Mother 2* is regarded by some Japanese critics as a work of postmodern literature. Itoi says that writing a game is like writing a newspaper; the director or producer acts as an editor. Where Itoi's team all submitted stories, which Itoi then 'edited' into the 'pages' of the game, Kojima flatly states that he writes every word of his own games; everything, including the relationships between the characters and the order of the events, is in his head before the game gets made.

"Except some of the codec dialogues," he says. He has a partner for those – Mr. Fukushima. This is understandable, as those dialogues sometimes drag on for an hour at a time. Gamers who don't get them can skip them, but that doesn't stop them from complaining about them, speaking ill of Kojima: literature doesn't belong in videogames.

Kojima agrees with them. "Games aren't literature," he tells me simply. Games are experiences you have. The most important parts of games aren't the works themselves – the DVDs containing *Metal Gear Solid 2* will someday deteriorate, and the PS2s to play the game will vanish.

Well, what about these games being passed down and remade? I ask him. Would you say there are games worth being remade? I'm trying to lure him over to talking about why he chose to remake the original *Metal Gear Solid* as *The Twin Snakes* for GameCube. It doesn't work.

Lately, the game he's playing most, he explains, is *Xevious* for the GBA. He says when he plays that game he understands why he liked it. He remembers his long-ago experiences with it, and enjoys the game thanks to his nostalgia. However, outside this nostalgia, it has very little to offer. For an unacquainted gamer whose life wasn't changed by the game, Kojima insists it's as much fun as driving a 30-year-old car: it gets you to your destination, it just isn't fast, or fun.

Here's where I want to say that *Metal Gear Solid* is a game that someone will be able to play in 20 years and appreciate. I know, however, that Kojima will deny it. He's told me that he doesn't intend for the original *Metal Gear Solid* to live on – that's why a dream team of writers and game designers are working on narrative essays that will be collected into a book about *Metal Gear Solid* that explains how the game made each participant feel.

"I DID WHAT I DID WITH PSYCHO MANTIS BECAUSE IT COULDN'T BE DONE IN ANY OTHER MEDIUM"

HIDEO KOJIMA, PRODUCER, KONAMI




While not universally loved, there are elements of *Sons Of Liberty* that are undisputed genius. In fact, it started so well that we lost track months ago of how many times we've played through the Tanker section. Scary stuff.

STORY TIME

The story of *Metal Gear Solid 2*, Kojima claims, is not a postmodern literary statement, it's merely a jumble of things inspired by current events infused with characters from Japanese giant-robot animation and action sequences from the writer's favourite American movies. It's inspired by the times and engaging to people living in these times; it is played, as a game, to reveal storyline bits which spur the player to play more. If the game were not intriguing, the player wouldn't care to play it. The story needs to only be interesting enough to keep the player playing.

This is a long way from Tecmo's 1988 *Ninja Gaiden*, which pioneered cinematic cut-scenes, the promise of which blessed many young players with endurance for granite-hard stages full of one-hit-kills. Now, though, games look too good. We're intrigued less by finishing as we are by continuing, and Kojima knows this.

He tells me games are all about moments. Games are things you sink yourself into by choice and end up losing many hours to, perhaps by accident. Games are things children take into their own rooms and play away from their parents' eyes, things that, when asked about, children will seldom powerfully venture to tell their parents: "What I'm doing, right here, is worthwhile"

The question, though, is how worthwhile are the stories in games? Kojima insists games' stories aren't composed as something that will end up as literature one day; the writer is simply taking pieces of the times and



Playing as Raiden remains one of the best-kept secrets in gaming. Shame it didn't go down too well…

throwing them together into something designed to keep the player pressing buttons. His only goal with the stories he tells is to make the player think, after saving and powering down, "'I want to re-enter this world of lies tomorrow'."

Charles Dickens' novels were serialised with a cliffhanger in every instalment designed to keep people buying. Yet today, we consider them literature. Is there a chance, then, that a hundred years from now *Metal Gear Solid 2*, designed with the Dickensian task of keeping the players playing (with 'three chapters a month' replaced with 'mustering the skill to take down that Harrier jet'), will push high school students to do an internet search on Napster the way students of today are forced to read about the French Revolution?

Exhibit A in the case of *Metal Gear Solid* as postmodern literature: the above-explained butt issue. Exhibit B is *Psycho Mantis*…



PSYCHO KILLER

Psycho Mantis is "The World's Most Powerful Psychic". He can make your joypad rumble ominously with his 'powers' (meaning you have to switch controller ports so he can't 'read' you); he can also seemingly turn off your console when you fight him, making the screen black out and the word 'Hideo' appear in the corner of the screen (although it looks like 'Video' at first glance, like you've switched to an input channel) – only when Mantis' laugh echoes around you does battle recommence.

The genius of these Psycho Mantis moments, Kojima would have us know, lies in their being just that: moments.

"Psycho Mantis is a character in a videogame. I did what I did with him because it was something that couldn't be done in any other medium." This is what Kojima tells me at E3 in May 2004, when I try, and fail, to get more game-making philosophy out of him. He tells me that he tried to write novels as a youngster – mostly in the detective noir serial genre – and got frustrated that he couldn't do anything anyone else hadn't already done. Videogames, he says, offer him that opportunity. He's simply not yet honed the technique to a point, he says. I don't know about that, though. Early in *Metal Gear Solid*, when your commanding officer tells you to get in touch with his niece Meryl, there's a moment that might just surpass everything Kojima's ever ▷

THE ART OF STEALTH

Yoji Shinkawa, the man responsible for much of the artistry in the *Metal Gear* series, joined Konami in 1994 as a rookie designer but soon made it quite clear what he was capable of when the acclaimed first *Metal Gear Solid* game was released.

Even though the 29-year old graphic artist is behind the cutting-edge visual designs seen in games like the PlayStation2's *Zone Of The Enders* and, most recently, *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater* he seems to be a man of few words and attempts to avoid the limelight wherever he can – a near impossible task for a man with such talent.

It's well known that Shinkawa prefers the brush over modern-day CG and leaves much of the polygon creation to his team. Influenced by many comics and manga (his favourites being *Gundam, Five Star Story* and *Hellboy*) his love of cartoon visuals rarely comes across in his work in the *Metal Gear* series, as he prefers menacing characters like Psycho Mantis, Revolver Ocelot and giant robots over doe-eyed heroines and caricatured villains.

Shinkawa has collaborated with Hideo Kojima on several occasions (both on the *Metal Gear* series and *Zone Of The Enders*) though the pair's working relationship isn't necessarily that close. In the past, Shinkawa has said that Kojima doesn't provide too much information about a character, which gives him plenty of freedom. "If the director gives a lot of character background information then it is quicker to get started on the design," Shinkawa has said, "but it isn't as much fun to do."



"SOMETHING SMALL AND INDEPENDENT"

Hideo Kojima has various plans for the future, including dreams of directing a movie ("Something small and independent"), going to space ("Only when in space will I understand why I wanted to go"), and… building a robot.

A giant robot, like a Metal Gear, or a Gundam, something to stomp around in?

"Giant robots don't interest me," he says. "They're just vehicles. Tools. Tanks." No, he's talking about intelligent robots. He has a Sony Aibo robotic dog – the ones that remember when you praise them, and are smart enough not to fall off a table. He's very interested in this kind of AI and is quietly researching it, he assures me.

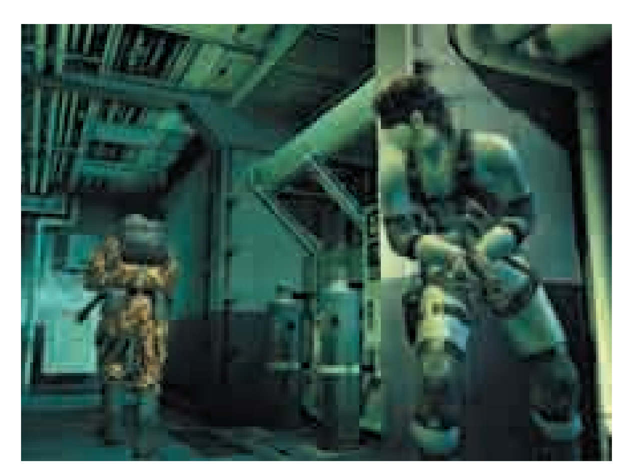
Between *Metal Gear* and *Metal Gear Solid*, Kojima produced graphic adventure games like *Snatcher* and *Policenauts*, sci-fi tales of robots imitating humans and police officers who pilot giant robots, and worked on the *Tokimeki Memorial* series, the pioneer of Japan's dating-simulation-game genre.

He's interested in robots because of artificial intelligence. *Snatcher* is very much a 'reimagining' of *Blade Runner* and his *Tokimeki Memorial* is about little more than forging relationships with other characters.

He plans to one day make a game "like wine", a game that will age as the player ages, unlocking new things over the course of months or years. This game may or may not be some kind of life-simulation, maybe a relationship simulation, and it will most likely be *Namage*, that game that self-destructs if you lose. ("Tamagotchi is too lenient," he says.) It might be for a videogame console, and if it is, it definitely won't be online. Or it might be that robot Kojima says he dreams of making. He won't say, for now.

All he'll say, when I ask him if there will be robots in the future, is "Definitely". When asked if he'll have a robot of his own, he answers without hesitation, "I will".





The *MGS* games are some of the few that really put the Dual Shock 2 to good use.

done. Snake asks the Colonel, "What's her codec frequency?" The Colonel then says, "Uh . . . I forget. Though it should be on the back of the CD case." If you have the CD case, and you flip it over, there it is – buried in that wall of screenshots that videogame PR would not allow a game box to go without is a screen of Snake talking to Meryl. He's saying just one word: "Meryl". The frequency number is highly visible.

Here, Hideo Kojima – who in recent years has released *Bokura no Taiyo* (*Boktai* for short, meaning 'our sun'), a Game Boy Advance game about killing vampires, in which your character's weapon is weak unless you're playing the game in a place where sunlight can enter the sensor built into the cartridge – is pulling the player out of the game, and letting them know that what they're playing is, after all, a game.

Years ago, Kojima expressed interest in making a game called *Namage* (short for 'namageemu', meaning 'raw game') that would self-destruct if you lost. This smacks of Revolver Ocelot's warning to Snake before *Metal Gear Solid*'s lose-it-and-lose-everything torture sequence: "Don't use a controller with auto-fire, because I'll know". Really, the game would be just recognising that you're pressing the button a hundred times a second, which isn't humanly possible, and this would tell the computer to penalise you, but it sure creeps you out the first time you hear him say it.

There we go again with that "the first time." It seems that all the literature of a Kojima game is in the first moments. If videogames are literature, they are literature of the moment.

TIME TO MOVE ON

Much later, Kojima and I are talking about dreams. He's telling me about his three big dreams. He tells me, first, that looking back on all of his videogames makes him realise how unsatisfied he is with them. I ask why making a game he finds satisfying is not one of his dreams, and he replies by saying, "Because videogames are my current field. I only dream about things I haven't done before."

Was getting into videogames ever a dream for him? Not exactly, he says. He first realised he wanted to make games when he played *Xevious* on the Famicom, and so he applied to Konami, which was developing games for Nintendo at that time. It was also, however, developing games for the technologically inferior MSX system. Much to his dismay, Kojima was put in the MSX division. When he came up with the idea for his first game, about a US Army spy destroying a secret weapon, he was faced with technological obstacles. For one thing, the MSX was slow, so shooting sprees were out of the question. Thinking back to the film *The Great Escape*, Kojima was inspired to make a game out of avoiding the bad guys. This was the beginning of the *Metal Gear* series' patented hide-and-seek gameplay, the gameplay which, to this day, still sees Solid Snake carrying a cardboard box around a nuclear waste disposal facility infested with terrorists. God knows where he keeps the box. Not like it matters – it's a videogame, after all.

Kojima says he's ready to move on from *Metal Gear*. He's been saying this since the middle of the production of *Metal Gear Solid 2*. This isn't to say he wants the series to end – he very much wants it to stay alive. He understands the significance of Solid Snake, the first manly man's hero of videogames. "I want Solid Snake to live on, like James Bond: different actors, different directors, same feeling." Yet his team pulled him back at the start of *Metal Gear Solid 3*. They were afraid that, without him, they'd pull out an uninspired sequel, like a *Resident Evil* sequel with more, bigger, faster zombies. He mentions Japanese animation genius Hayao Miyazaki, who is pulled back into making another movie every time he announces his retirement. Kojima doesn't want that to happen to him. "Put it in your article, in big, bold capital letters," Kojima instructs me: "'NO MORE *METAL GEAR* FOR HIDEO KOJIMA'. Then I can be free."

> "I WANT SOLID SNAKE TO LIVE ON, LIKE JAMES BOND: DIFFERENT ACTORS, DIFFERENT DIRECTORS, SAME FEELING"
> HIDEO KOJIMA, PRODUCER, KONAMI

Then he wonders – might that hurt the sales of the third game? I tell him I don't think so. It'll probably even help it, make it like his swansong. Even so, if I say 'no more *Metal Gear*', it's not like it's saying 'no more videogames', is it? These people know Kojima by now. They know he's going to keep surprising them. The question is, how?

My suggestion is that he make a game based on Sergio Leone's The Good, The Bad, And The Ugly, maybe even getting Clint Eastwood to do his own voice. Kojima shakes this off. I mention Japanese film auteur Beat Takeshi's 1986 videogame Takeshi no Chousenjou, the final boss of which must be hit 20,000 times to kill. Kojima smirks at the memory of the game. I'm sure, on some strange, tangential level, that

it must have inspired him – for one thing, the final boss of his 2000 *Zone Of The Enders* is an invincible giant robot you can only run away from, which flies in the face of many, many action game 'rules'.

Yet Kojima takes risks because he loves videogames, and is committed to bringing others who love games quality entertainment that pushes constraints. Takeshi's one-time game effort's title screen is prefaced with a disclaimer: "The person who made this game despises videogames". Why might a film director like Beat Takeshi or Hayao Miyazaki hate videogames? Kojima shrugs. His friend, Ryuhei Kitamura, who directed both the film *Versus* and the movie sequences in *Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes*, certainly doesn't seem to hate games. It must be a generational thing, he says. Either that, or he and Kitamura have too much in common when it comes to taste in books – they email each other back and forth, he says, saying "Read this book *or else*."

I've learned by now that Kojima might respect books more than movies. Why not make a movie based on an old book?

Kojima snaps his fingers. "I was thinking something like that. Ten or 12 years now, I've been thinking of it."

He won't say which particular book. I throw out guesses: Kobo Abe's *The Woman In The Dunes*? I know this is his favourite book. He says no; there's a question of adaptation. How about Haruki Murakami's *Hard-Boiled Wonderland And The End Of The World*? He's never read that one, though people keep telling him to. I'm surprised, because *Metal Gear Solid 2* reminded me of that book.

That book was written as a result of Murakami reading a lot of books; *Metal Gear Solid 2* might have come about because Kojima's read equally as many books. He used to read around three books a day, though these days he "only" reads ten or so a month. He is quick to note that an average of one in 20 of these books is actually any good. I say that some people say the same thing about games, replacing "one in 20" with "Hideo Kojima games".

He tells me, then, his definition of a game that will satisfy him, and leave him free to pursue his other dreams. There's this movie, he says, he saw when he was young. In it, an old man sacrifices his place on one of the spaceships that's evacuating a doomed Earth so that a young couple could fly off to a new future together.

"It's that sort of feeling," Kojima said. He saw this movie at three years of age, and isn't sure, even today, if it was any good, or even if he liked it. Still – as a real, live three-year-old child, he saw a fictional old man grant a fictional young man and woman a fictional future that might as well be real. What he felt then is what he wants to make people feel with that future videogame that will satisfy him as an artist.

SEEING CLEARLY

Time is running short, and Kojima has to get back to work on *Metal Gear Solid 3*. I know this, and he knows this, because he's just finished his fourth cup of slow-drunk coffee. I rush to ask him some final questions.

What does he think about the direction other "brilliant" games are going? The most recent masterpiece, as far as he's concerned, is Capcom's *Gyakuten Saiban 3*, a Game Boy graphic adventure game where the action pretty much never leaves a courtroom. He says he can see the beauty of *Grand Theft Auto III*, though he can't play it himself (motion sickness). He says that if he passed such a plan on to his team they'd reject it, saying it was impossible. Whatever games he makes, he prefers to bless the player with "liberty" as opposed to "freedom".

He cites a scene near the end of *Metal Gear Solid* as a capsule of his "liberty" philosophy: the robotic ninja, recently revealed to be a good guy, is crushed beneath the foot of Metal Gear Rex. He cries out to Snake, "Shoot him!" Snake aims his stinger missile launcher. The player is now free to aim the missile launcher at Rex. The ninja continues his sad tale, which takes several minutes. Every time the player presses the fire button, Snake says, "No!" or "I can't!" This game's story plays heavily with themes of what you're expected to do in the line of duty.

I have a sketchbook I carry around for the sake of collecting signatures of famous people. I ask Kojima to write something "creative" in it. He goes to work with a fat black marker. Next to his signature, he draws an old Japanese man's smiling face and the two Chinese characters – "Shuku-mei," meaning 'Fate'.

"Why did you write 'Fate'?"

He shrugs. "It's what I felt like writing."

This is when I ask him if I can try on his glasses.

"Sure."

I take my glasses off. He takes them from me before he takes off his own. Before I have his glasses on my face, he's put on mine.

He squints. He says something about my glasses being dirty. I say how I can't see well enough to clean them myself. I'd meant to clean them at a supersonic-wave glasses-cleaning station before I got to the interview, though I was delayed on account of a suicide on the Hibiya Line.

"Ahh," Kojima says. "That's a shame."

FATE!

I put on his glasses. They're the cleanest glasses I've ever worn. Hideo Kojima and I have nearly identical eyeglass prescriptions. How he got his this clean, though, I don't know. The man has some secrets.

Psycho Mantis' mind control 'feats' have yet to be equalled in terms of sheer ingenuity. Thanks, Kojima.



"PUT IT IN YOUR ARTICLE IN BIG, BOLD LETTERS: NO MORE METAL GEAR FOR HIDEO KOJIMA"

HIDEO KOJIMA, PRODUCER, KONAMI

COMMUNITY

EVERY ISSUE, **games™** VISITS A DIFFERENT DEVELOPER. THIS MONTH A MIGHTY TREK TO CHAMPAIGN, ILLINOIS, WAS ON THE CARDS…

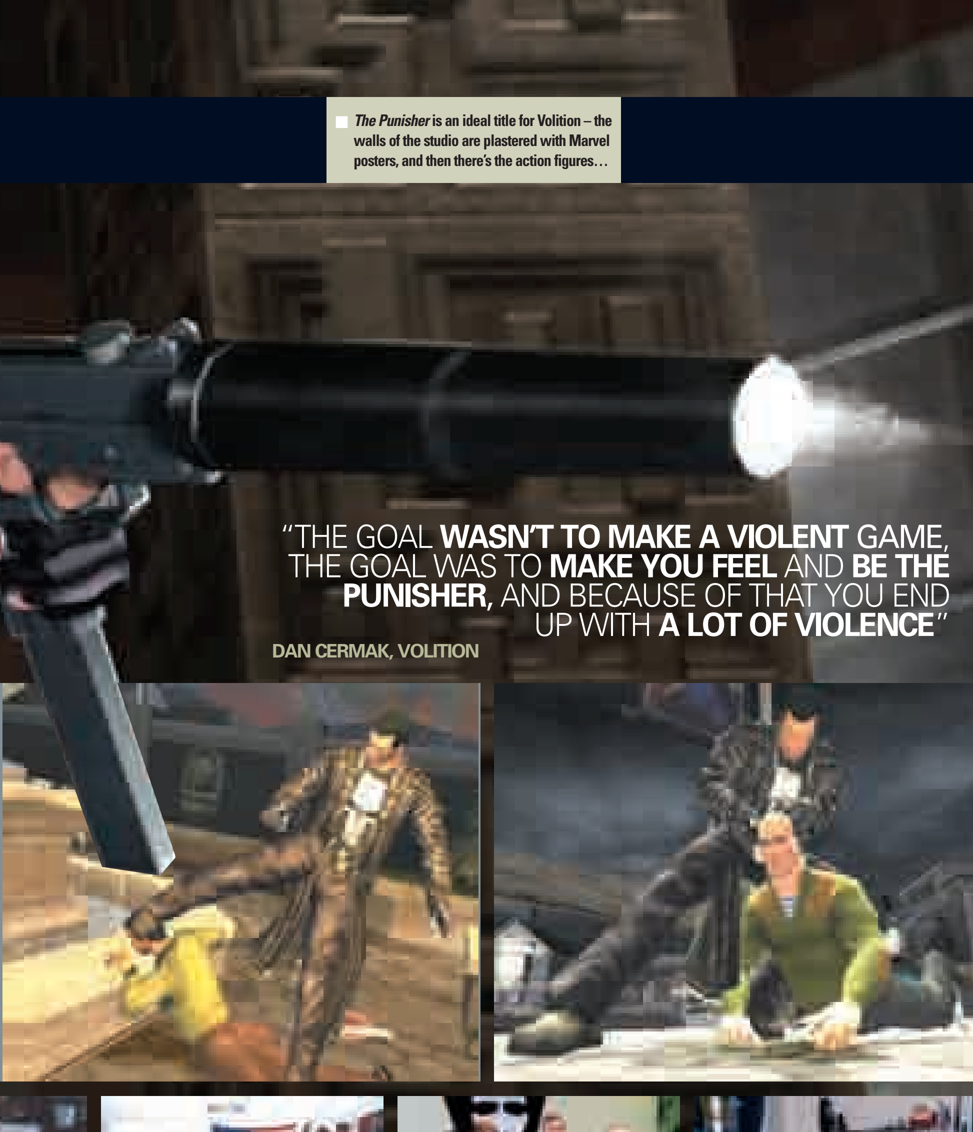


VOLITION

WITH A NUMBER OF CRITICALLY HAILED TITLES SAFELY TUCKED UNDER ITS BELT, VOLITION IS GEARING UP FOR BLOODY CARNAGE WITH ITS MOST AMBITIOUS OFFERING TO DATE. GAMES™ HEADS A FEW HUNDRED MILES SOUTH OF CHICAGO TO UNCOVER THE BLOOD-SOAKED TRUTH…

Chicago, home of Sears Tower and Al Capone, and the site of one of Capone's most infamous acts of violence – the Valentine's Day massacre of 1929. Two and half hours' drive and 130 miles south of Chicago lies the small town of Champaign, home to some equally violent goings-on. This is where you'll find Volition, the developer behind a number of titles including the critically acclaimed *Red Faction* series and the epic fantasy RPG *Summoner*. More recently, the team has upped the stakes and moved across town to a lavish new building that houses an impressive foyer decorated with awards, artwork and – more strikingly – a small fortune in refurbished arcade cabinets (a cherished pastime for a number of the Volition team). These include Nintendo's *Donkey Kong* and Capcom's side-scrolling beat-'em-up, *The Punisher*, which happens to be the developer's current project…

Volition's adaptation of Marvel's darkest character is no doubt destined to turn heads for a number of reasons, most of which will be directly related to the astronomical level of blood, guts and gore the developer has poured into the already impressive looking game. While the games world has attracted plenty of negative press in the last couple of months following the

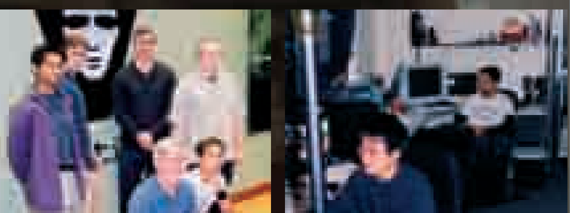


The Punisher is an ideal title for Volition – the walls of the studio are plastered with Marvel posters, and then there's the action figures…

"THE GOAL **WASN'T TO MAKE A VIOLENT** GAME, THE GOAL WAS TO **MAKE YOU FEEL** AND **BE THE PUNISHER**, AND BECAUSE OF THAT YOU END UP WITH **A LOT OF VIOLENCE**"

DAN CERMAK, VOLITION





implication of *Manhunt* in a young man's murder, vice president of Volition, Dan Cermak, is all too aware of the issues at hand, but eager to point out that the game isn't meant to court controversy. "The goal wasn't to make a violent game," he says. "The goal was to make you feel and be The Punisher, and because of that you end up with a lot of violence." Despite having a good working relationship with the US games rating board, the ERSB, Volition has had to implement a censorship filter in order to avoid the dreaded NC-17 rating, which basically means that certain portions of the game will appear in black and white (for obvious reasons). On the flipside, European gamers may well be treated to a completely uncensored version should THQ and Volition get their way, so now would be the time for gore-fiends to cross their fingers.

The world of The Punisher is a violent one; one which will no doubt push back the boundaries of what's possible in gaming. But Cermak is quick to point out that the violence in *The Punisher* is very tongue-in-cheek and worlds apart from, say, Rockstar's *Manhunt*. "It's that kind of comic-book edge to the violence that's too over the top to be taken seriously, and that's how we wanted it to be," he explains. With over a hundred ways to dispose of bad guys, including the extremely inventive and ground-breaking 'Environmental Kills', which range from dunking heads in chroming machines to castration via a rampant rhinoceros in the confines of New York Zoo, the sheer scope of death is jaw-dropping, to say the least. But funny, of course.

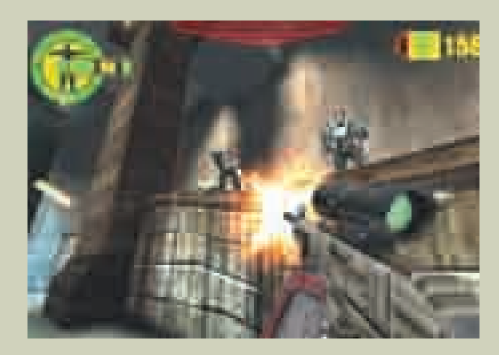
Volition has already been pushing back boundaries in other ways, only behind the scenes rather than as part of the story. Its pioneering use of Geo-Mod technology came to light with its first-person shooter *Red Faction II*. In the game, the player was able to destroy almost everything on screen; holes could be blown through walls, obstacles could be cleared, and tunnels could be created at the

VOLHISTORY

Before meeting The Punisher, Volition had already established itself as a solid game developer

RED FACTION [MULTI, 2001]

Set on Mars, Volition's critically acclaimed FPS tells the tale of disgruntled miners working on the red planet who decide to take matters into their own hands. Taking the role of Parker you have to battle through a gripping storyline with the help of a number of allies including the weasel Griffon, the horrific Capek and the brutal Masako.

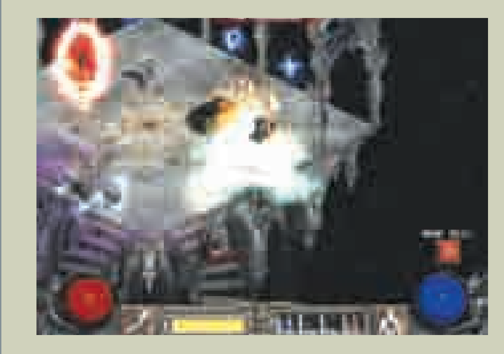


RED FACTION II [MULTI, 2002]

Second time out and 18 months in development, *Red Faction II* saw Volition return to its million-selling brand with this sequel that built upon every aspect of the original, showcasing its understanding of how to use the environments around you by allowing the player to obliterate almost everything in sight.

SUMMONER [MULTI, 2000]

One of the first RPGs for the PS2, *Summoner* was ported from the PC. Focusing on the story of Joseph, one of the last remaining Summoners, Volition's epic fantasy incorporated all manner of plot devices that saw the player searching for the mystical Summoner Rings. With over 120 characters and 16 summoned beasts, the 50-hour RPG attracted plenty of interest.



SUMMONER 2 [MULTI, 2002]

Once again, Volition proved its ability to take a well-crafted game engine and build upon it in every way. An ever-twisting story saw you take on the role of Maia, 'the goddess of Laharah reborn', in a sometimes over-complicated game that pitted you against pirates on the high seas and your own people who turned on you thanks to the evil King of Galdyr.

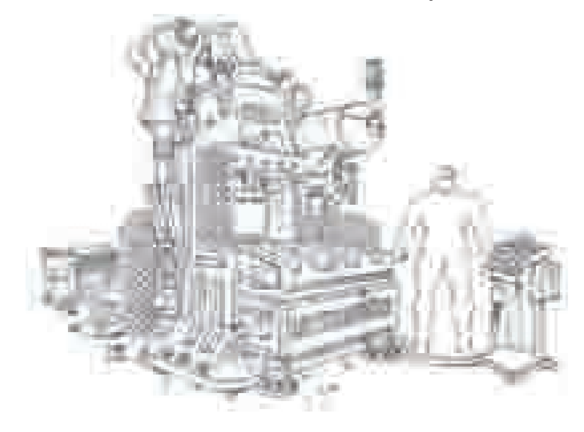
A LITTLE HELP FROM YOUR FRIENDS

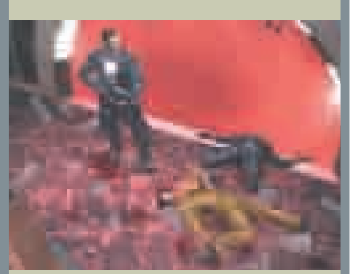
Throughout The Punisher's journey through the grim underbelly of the criminal world, you meet a host of other superheroes from the pages of Marvel, including Agent Of Shield super-soldier Nick Fury (who, coincidentally, appeared alongside The Punisher in Capcom's 1993 *Punisher* arcade game). Also appearing alongside Castle is none other than Tony Stark (aka Iron Man), whose huge building serves as one of the game's later levels (and also contains a cracking *Half-Life* gag). While Black Cat dropped in to lend a hand with Spider-Man in the adaptation of the year's biggest movie, the sultry Black Widow slips into the weaving *Punisher* storyline to take part in a bout of fisticuffs with the super-villains and mobsters. While none of these characters can be controlled (as far as we know), their interjection is welcome and adds to the overall essence of this dark journey of discovery the Punisher undertakes.



MEET THE NEIGHBOURS

Some of the enemies you'll face will look familiar if you're a fan of the *Punisher* comics. Other times, you'll be offing hordes of nameless henchmen. Either way, it's still fun.





Get used to seeing mangled bodies all over the shop – mangling bodies is what you do best.



PUNISHER BIOGRAPHY





Now that's going to need some serious therapy…



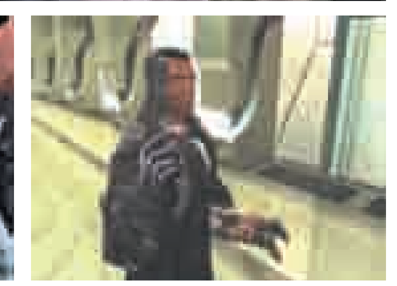


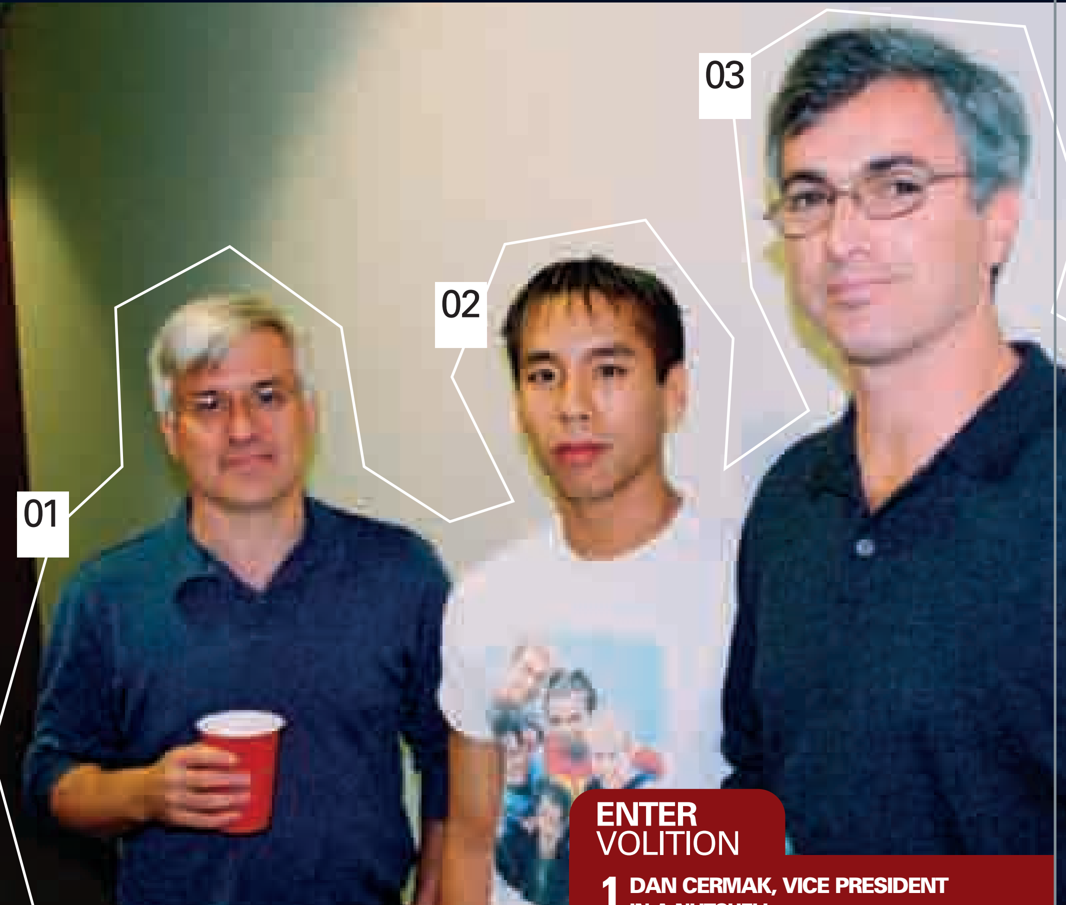
Stark Security – these highly trained officers could make The Punisher's life difficult. Well, more difficult than it is…

press of a button. The technology brought with it a new level of gameplay that has since been adapted by other developers in the field. And it's proved useful when making *The Punisher*. "After we shipped *Red Faction II* we spent a lot of time just working on technology, building levels and prototyping stuff," says James Tsai, one of *The Punisher*'s producers. "And while that was going on we were wondering: do we want to do an action game? Do we want to do a space marines game? What are doing? Then we found out that THQ had the *Punisher* licence. So here we had spent several months prototyping technology and ways we could do third-person action and we had tons of comic fans. It was just a natural fit and so we said 'we got to do it!'. We took some new engine components that we've built and just started right away."

For those of you up in arms at the lack of faithful comic-to-game conversions (with the exception of *Spider-Man 2* and *X-Men Legends*), rest assured that not only has Volition handled the property immaculately, the project has been more a labour of love than a mere job. "It was pitched by a couple of guys who were big *Punisher* fans and the pitch was pretty much were we wanted it to go and it went very well from there," says Cermak. With Garth Ennis, current writer on the character's run in the Marvel Max series, on scripting duties along with legendary writer and inker Jimmy Palmiotti, the story itself is going to have fans of the ongoing series wrapped up in *Punisher* nirvana. "The *Welcome Back Frank* collection [Ennis and







"HOW COULD ANY DEVELOPER **RESIST THE URGE** TO USE **WOOD-CHIPPERS** AND PIRANHA TANKS TO **ELIMINATE FOES**?"
JAMES TSAI, VOLITION

Palmiotti's stripped-down take on the character] was required reading for everyone on the team," says Tsai, who admits that each Wednesday morning sees the weekly ritual of heading across town with the rest of the crew to pick up their supply of new comic books.

"It was the brilliance of this graphic novel that actually drove us to pursue Garth and Jimmy for this project," Tsai continues, "and we've definitely asked them to capture some of the more memorable moments from the story for the game. Fans of the comic will not be disappointed; though the overarching plot is a completely new storyline, there are definitely some familiar tips of the hat to past stories. I mean, how could any developer resist the urge to include wood-chippers and piranha tanks as wonderful ways to eliminate your foes? That would require a non-twisted world view. We don't have that here at Volition."

Borrowing elements from *Welcome Back Frank*, the game sees The Punisher lock horns with long-time nemeses Jigsaw, Bushwacka and Ma Gnucci throughout a number of locations including exotic islands and the concrete jungle. Coupled with contributions from Ennis and Palmiotti, Volition also managed to secure actor Thomas Jane – who played The Punisher in this year's film – for voice-acting duties. "We needed to get the voice of The Punisher right – especially with how much he was talking, how much he talked to himself in the game, how many great one liners he had," explains Tsai on Volition's crucial casting decision. "If we didn't get the right voice for that the game would have just fallen apart – it was one of those absolutely critical issues that you have to nail."

These contributions and Volition's determination to stay true to the material, while at the same time crafting a title that will cater to non-comic book readers just as much as it will to the hardcore fan base, is a testament to the powerhouse potential of *The Punisher*. With just a few months to go before the game hits shelves, word is spreading fast that there's something diverse and unique on its way, thanks to positive feedback at this year's E3 and the San Diego Comic Con. It looks like Volition is assured of another hit game to its name, though any future projects are being kept under wraps. So until judgement day comes, remember just one thing: guilt equals death.

ENTER VOLITION

1 DAN CERMAK, VICE PRESIDENT
IN A NUTSHELL:
Cermack joined the industry in 1985, writing for the C64 and Atari 800. He worked for SSI for 11 years, then joined Westwood as executive producer on *Renegade*. In 2002 he joined Volition as VP of product development.

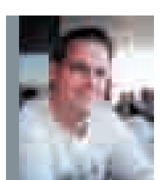
2 JAMES TSAI, SENIOR ASSOCIATE PRODUCER AND DESIGNER
IN A NUTSHELL:
Tsai began his career in games as a tester and is now a senior associate producer and designer at Volition. During his time at Volition James has worked on the *FreeSpace, Summoner* and *Red Faction* franchises before getting stuck in with *The Punisher*.

3 RICK WHITE, PRODUCER
IN A NUTSHELL:
Rick started out in 1988 working on *Pool Of Radiance* for SSI on the PC. Throughout the Nineties he worked on a number of strategy and role-playing titles for SSI including *Fantasy General, Panzer General, Dark Colony, Stone Prophet, Darksun* and several Gold Box games. Rick then went to work at 3D0, and soon after its demise he arrived at Volition to begin work on *The Punisher*.



THE PEOPLE IN THE GAMES INDUSTRY TELL IT LIKE IT IS…

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY



BioWare has spent the past few years building up a large online community and many other publishers and developers are doing the same. But why are online communities becoming important in our industry?

The answer is complex, but as the videogame industry matures it becomes more important to have a loyal group of fans who repeatedly buy your products. At BioWare, we try to differentiate our games by focusing on quality, story and character – as a result, we have attracted a community of fans who like story and character in their games.

So why are communities of fans important now? First, you can market to them – for example, send out newsletters, or show them details of your products online. Also, you can poll them to get information on their purchase habits. You can also survey them to get design info that you can incorporate into your games. Finally, you can sell directly to them; we've opened up an online store selling *NeverWinter Nights* modules, but our goal is to sell other products both from BioWare and other developers

What benefits do fans get from a community? They get a place to go to learn more about their favourite games; they are at a place where people of similar interests gather, so there are plenty of people to talk to about a variety of topics.

Once a game is released the community site is the best place to go to for hints, Easter eggs and detailed information about the games. Finally, fans get a chance to communicate with the developers – they can provide ideas for upcoming games, as well as comment on past games.

Communities are important and valuable, and you'll see more of them in years to come.

DR RAY MUZYKA, JOINT CEO, BIOWARE

FROM THE FRONT

ELECTRONIC ARTS TAKES ANOTHER DEVELOPER UNDER ITS WING, WHILE CAPCOM TURNS A PROFIT

EA's involvement should be good for DICE.

EA LOOKS SET TO PICK UP ANOTHER BARGAIN

EA PLAYS

Electronic Arts looks set to receive a nice little new-year bonus in the form of Stockholm-based developer Digital Illusions CE. DICE is a safe bet to become yet another subsidiary of EA after the industry giant made an offer for all the shares in the Swedish company.

As it stands, EA already owns around 19 per cent of DICE, which it bought back in 2003 when the two companies entered into a 15-year distribution deal, and is both the publisher and licence holder of the developer's hugely successful *Battlefield* series.

The Digital Illusions board of directors has already recommended that shareholders should accept EA's offer, saying that being a part of Electronic Arts will help push the company towards next-generation development faster.

"The game industry is entering a very challenging period of technology transition," said DICE chairman Torsten Larsson in a statement concerning the buyout. "Making DICE a full partner with EA will strengthen DICE's ability to navigate

"MAKING DICE A FULL PARTNER WITH EA WILL **STRENGTHEN DICE'S ABILITY** TO NAVIGATE THE TRANSITION TO THE **NEXT GENERATION OF TECHNOLOGY**"



Transformers was one of the few titles Atari has had success with this year.



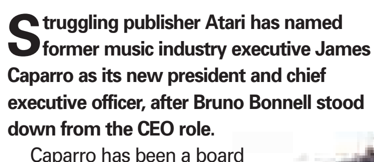
ALL CHANGE AT ATARI

JAMES CAPARRO STEPS INTO BRUNO'S BOOTS

Struggling publisher Atari has named former music industry executive James Caparro as its new president and chief executive officer, after Bruno Bonnell stood down from the CEO role.

Caparro has been a board member of Atari since February 2002, and has previously been CEO of three major music labels.

Atari has been having a tough time over the last year, seeing its revenues drop from $109.4 million to $60.6 million, with a net loss of $28.7 million, compared with a net profit of $731,000 for the same period in 2003. The company was also required to pay a $39.4 million dividend to its parent company, Infogrames, as part of a settlement of a large long-term debt, which brought the overall loss for the quarter to $68.1 million. How much this has contributed to the reshuffle is unclear, but we can expect to see some changes.



"Jim's track record is impeccable," said Bonnell in a statement, "and we are thrilled to have an executive of his calibre and reputation leading Atari."

Bonnell will continue to serve as CEO and chairman of Infogrames.

DICE

the transition to the next generation of technology."

DICE's *Battlefield* franchise – which has managed to sell about 4 million units to date – is the series that has established the developer's reputation. However, the franchise's move to console was delayed recently when the planned console title, *Battlefield: Modern Combat*, was delayed by over a year because EA insisted on having a single-player campaign included with the package.

EA has already confirmed that should everything go according to plan, it aims to add many employees to the studio as well as a few new franchises. With EA firmly behind it, it looks like we can expect some big things from DICE in the future.

BATTLEFIELD SERIES TOTAL SALES (APPROX)

- North America: 2.2 million
- Europe: 1.8 million
- Rest Of World: 0.4 million

UK MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Need For Speed Underground 2	EA Games	Multi
2	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar	PS2
3	FIFA 2005	EA Sports	Multi
4	The Incredibles	THQ	Multi
5	Call Of Duty: Finest Hour	Activision	Multi
6	Pro Evolution Soccer 4	Konami	Multi
7	GoldenEye: Rogue Agent	EA Games	Multi
8	Halo 2	Microsoft	Xbox
9	WWE Smackdown! VS Raw	THQ	Multi
10	The Getaway: Black Monday	Sony	PS2

We thought it might stay at the top of the charts for a while longer, but *San Andreas* is knocked from the top spot by *Need For Speed Underground 2*. Never underestimate the number of boy racers that are out there.

All information is compiled by ChartTrack and is the strict copyright of Elspa (UK) Ltd. UK Entertainment Software Sales Charts (Full Price, All Formats) (w/e 3 December 2004)



NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND 2

GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS

FIFA 2005

CAPCOM DOES WELL IN THE ARCADES

CAPCOM'S COMEBACK

Capcom managed to turn a profit in the first half of 2004, largely thanks to increased arcade revenues. The company made a profit of some ¥919 million ($7.1 million) in the six months ending September 2004, a great improvement on the loss of ¥17.3 billion ($134 million) in the same period last year.

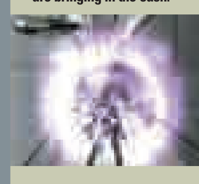
Capcom's arcade division is believed to have generated most of the profit. Sega has also enjoyed improved performance in the arcades, suggesting that Japan's arcades are becoming popular again after a slight slump in the past year – even though much of this new-found profitability is being created by the closure of less successful venues.

Capcom's profit has come about despite a drop in sales revenues, which fell 13 per cent to ¥22.5 billion ($174.6 million), and was accompanied by a massive 69 per cent decline in profits from the company's consumer sector.

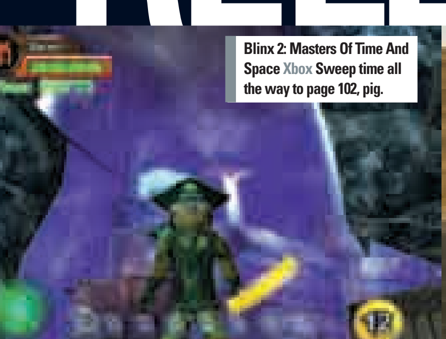
Now Capcom expects to announce profits of ¥4.2 billion ($32.6 million) on sales of ¥63 billion ($489.2 million) for the full year. This is a huge improvement for the company as only a few years ago it was thought to be in crisis after the falling value of property in Japan caused the company huge losses.

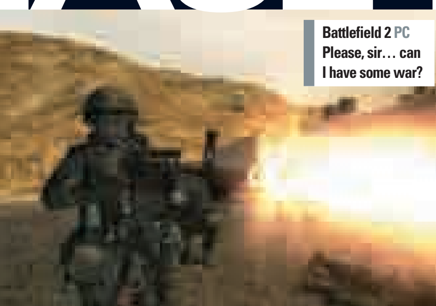


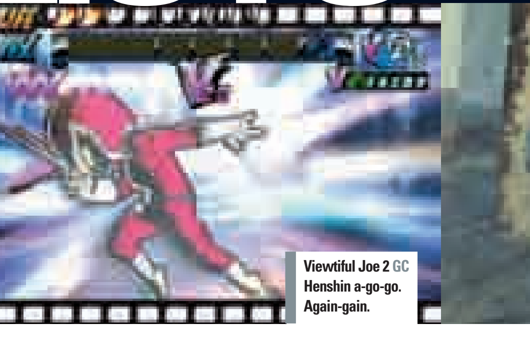
Despite great console titles, it's the arcades that are bringing in the cash.



RELEASE LISTS


Blinx 2: Masters Of Time And Space Xbox Sweep time all the way to page 102, pig.


Battlefield 2 PC Please, sir… can I have some war?

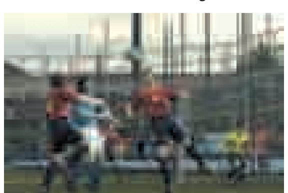

Viewtiful Joe 2 GC Henshin a-go-go. Again-gain.



PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 4

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Konami

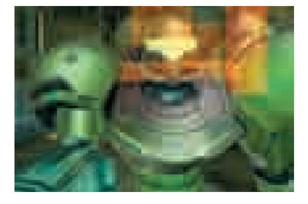
This might have a few issues that weren't so apparent in *Winning Eleven 8* but Live support is the answer to a million prayers. Even a few minor lag issues (at the time of going to press, at least) haven't stopped us declaring sleep overrated, but we're assured Konami is 'working on it'. Nice.



METROID PRIME 2

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Nintendo

We've finished it too, y'know. Just because we didn't spoil the final boss this time shouldn't make you believe otherwise. We're just going through again with a view to scanning everything that can be scanned and finding everything that can be found. And some things that can't.



METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SNAKE EATER

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Konami

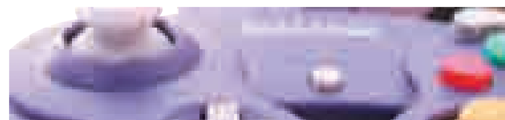
It may have split the office down the middle, but for those that appreciate it *Snake Eater* is one of the few games that has come between us and the biggest domestic releases of the Christmas period. It's just too bad most people won't get their claws in it until March.





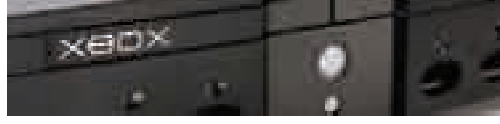
PLAYSTATION2

Month	Title	Publisher	
JANUARY '05			
14 January	ESPN NBA 2005	Sega	
14 January	ESPN NFL 2005	Sega	
14 January	ESPN NHL 2005	Sega	
14 January	Outlaw Golf 2	Global Star	
14 January	Robotech Invasion	Global Star	
28 January	Blood Will Tell	Sega	
TBC	EyeToy: Chat	Sony	
TBC	Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	Rockstar	
TBC	SNK Vs Capcom Chaos	Ignition	
FEBRUARY '05			
04 February	Sonic Mega Collection Plus	Sega	
04 February	Phantom Brave	Koei	Wanted
11 February	Neighbours From Hell	JoWood	
11 February	Playboy: The Mansion	Ubisoft	
11 February	Constantine	SCi	
11 February	Mega Man X8	Capcom	
18 February	Mercenaries	Activision	
18 February	Shadow Of Rome	Capcom	
25 February	Samurai Warriors: Xtreme Legends	Koei	
25 February	Brothers In Arms	Ubisoft	Wanted
25 February	Stolen	Hip Interactive	
TBC	The Punisher	THQ	
TBC	Capcom Fighting Jam	Capcom	
TBC	Altered Beast	Sega	
TBC	EyeToy: Kinetic	Sony	
TBC	Phantom Crash 2050	Konami	
TBC	Ace Combat 5	Sony	
MARCH '05			
11 March	CT Special Forces: Fire For Effect	Hip Interactive	
25 March	Devil May Cry 3	Capcom	Wanted
25 March	Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Astro Boy	Sega	
TBC	Guilty Gear Isuka	Sega	
Q1 '05			
TBC	Shadow Of Rome	Capcom	
TBC	Destroy All Humans!	THQ	
TBC	La Pucelle	Koei	Wanted
TBC	Kessen III	Koei	
TBC	King Of Fighters: Maximum Impact	Ignition	
TBC	Shadow Hearts: Covenant	Midway	
TBC	Everybody's Golf 4	Sony	
TBC	MotoGP 4	Sony	
TBC	Cold Winter	Vivendi	
TBC	Gran Turismo 4	Sony	Wanted
TBC	SOCOM 3	Sony	
TBC	Kingdom Hearts 2	Sony	Wanted
TBC	Okami	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	Resident Evil Outbreak: File 2	Capcom	
TBC	The Nightmare Before Christmas	Capcom	
TBC	Tak 2: The Staff Of Dreams	THQ	
TBC	Far Cry Instincts	Ubisoft	
TBC	Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater	Konami	Wanted
TBC	Death By Degrees	Sony	
TBC	Sniper Elite	TBC	Wanted
TBC	Lego Star Wars	Eidos	
TBC	Nanobreaker	Konami	
TBC	Rumble Roses	Konami	
TBC	NARC	Midway	
TBC	Super Monkey Ball Deluxe	Sega	
TBC	Viewtiful Joe 2	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	Neo Contra	Konami	
TBC	Monster Hunter	Capcom	Wanted



GAMECUBE

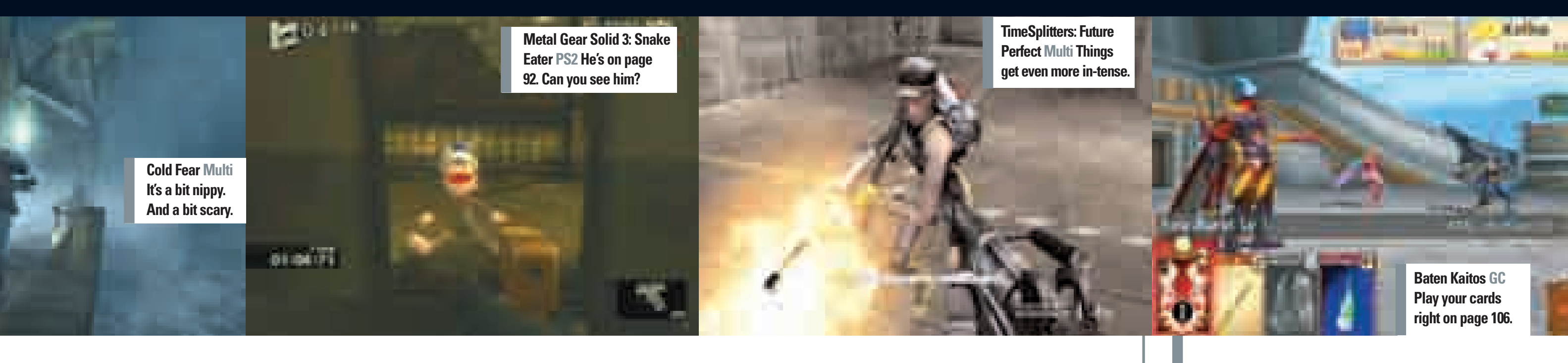
Month	Title	Publisher	
JANUARY '05			
07 January	The Legend Of Zelda: Four Swords Adventure	Nintendo	Wanted
FEBRUARY '05			
04 February	Donkey Kong: Jungle Beat	Nintendo	Wanted
11 February	Neighbours From Hell	JoWood	
25 February	Mario Power Tennis	Nintendo	
MARCH '05			
11 March	Mario Party 6	Nintendo	
18 March	Resident Evil 4	Capcom	Wanted
Q1 '05			
TBC	Advance Wars: Under Fire	Nintendo	
TBC	Tak 2: The Staff Of Dreams	THQ	
TBC	Viewtiful Joe 2	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	Nintendo Puzzle Collection	Nintendo	
TBC	Star Fox	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Odama	Nintendo	
TBC	Scaler	Global Star	
TBC	Area 51	Midway	
TBC	Killer7	Capcom	Wanted



XBOX

Month	Title	Publisher
JANUARY '05		
14 January	ESPN NBA 2005	Sega
14 January	ESPN NFL 2005	Sega
14 January	ESPN NHL 2005	Sega
14 January	Outlaw Golf 2	Global Star

CALM YOUR FEVERISH ANTICIPATION WITH OUR COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF FORTHCOMING RELEASES



Cold Fear Multi It's a bit nippy. And a bit scary.

Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater PS2 He's on page 92. Can you see him?

TimeSplitters: Future Perfect Multi Things get even more in-tense.

Baten Kaitos GC Play your cards right on page 106.

14 January	Robotech Invasion	Global Star	
28 January	American McGee's Scrapland	Deep Silver	
TBC	MechAssault 2: Lone Wolf	Microsoft	
TBC	Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	Rockstar	
TBC	SNK Vs Capcom Chaos	Ignition	
FEBRUARY '05			
11 February	Neighbours From Hell	JoWood	
11 February	Playboy: The Mansion	Ubisoft	
11 February	Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic II: The Sith Lords	Activision	Wanted
18 February	Mercenaries	Activision	
25 February	Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict	Midway	
25 February	Brothers In Arms	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	The Punisher	THQ	
TBC	Constantine	SCi	
TBC	Forza Motorsport	Microsoft	
TBC	Capcom Fighting Jam	Capcom	
MARCH '05			
25 March	Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Otogi 2	Sega	
Q1 '05			
TBC	Doom 3	Activision	
TBC	Dead Or Alive Ultimate	Microsoft	Wanted
TBC	Pariah	Hip Interactive	
TBC	Sniper Elite	TBC	Wanted
TBC	Star Wars: Republic Commando	Activision	
TBC	Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath	EA	Wanted
TBC	NARC	Midway	
TBC	Operation Flashpoint	Codemasters	
TBC	Far Cry Instincts	Ubisoft	
TBC	CT Special Forces: Fire For Effect	Hip Interactive	
TBC	Half-Life 2	Vivendi	Wanted
TBC	Destroy All Humans!	THQ	Wanted
TBC	Super Monkey Ball Deluxe	Sega	
TBC	Lego Star Wars	Eidos	
TBC	Area 51	Midway	
TBC	Conker: Live And Reloaded	Microsoft	
TBC	Kameo: Elements Of Power	Microsoft	
TBC	Sid Meier's Pirates!	Atari	Wanted
TBC	Tak 2: The Staff Of Dreams	THQ	
TBC	Jade Empire	Microsoft	Wanted



PC

Month	Title	Publisher	
JANUARY '05			
28 January	American McGee's Scrapland	Deep Silver	
28 January	Close Combat: First To Fight	Take 2	
FEBRUARY '05			
04 February	City Of Heroes	NC Soft	
04 February	Creature Conflict: The Clan Wars	Cenega	
04 February	Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	Midway	
11 February	Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic II: The Sith Lords	Activision	Wanted
11 February	Playboy: The Mansion	Ubisoft	
18 February	X2: The Return	Deep Silver	
25 February	Brothers In Arms	Ubisoft	Wanted
25 February	Stolen	Hip Interactive	
TBC	Immortal Cities: Children Of The Nile	Sega	
TBC	Second Sight	Codemasters	
MARCH '05			
04 March	Star Wars: Republic Commando	Activision	
11 March	CT Special Forces: Fire For Effect	Hip Interactive	
Q1 '05			
TBC	Duke Nukem Forever	Vivendi	
TBC	Bet On Soldier	Digital Jesters	
TBC	The Matrix Online	Warner Bros	
TBC	Sniper Elite	TBC	Wanted
TBC	UFO: Aftershock	Cenega	
TBC	Pariah	Hip Interactive	
TBC	Lego Star Wars	Eidos	
TBC	Black & White 2	EA	
TBC	Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Battlefield 2	EA	Wanted
TBC	Operation Flashpoint 2	Codemasters	Wanted
TBC	S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow Of Chernobyl	THQ	Wanted



GAME BOY ADVANCE

Month	Title	Publisher	
JANUARY '05			
TBC	It's Mr Pants	THQ	
TBC	Banjo Pilot	THQ	
FEBRUARY '05			
18 February	Advance Guardian Heroes	Sega	
TBC	Kingdom Hearts: Chain Of Memories	Buena Vista	Wanted
Q1 '05			
TBC	Boktai 2: Solar Boy Django	Konami	
TBC	Pokémon Emerald	Nintendo	
TBC	F-Zero Climax	Nintendo	
TBC	Elf: The Movie	TBC	
TBC	Metal Slug Advance	Ignition	Wanted
TBC	Donkey Kong: King Of Swing	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Tak 2: The Staff Of Dreams	THQ	

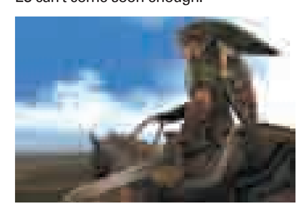
PLEASE NOTE: While every effort has been made to ensure these dates are correct at the time of going to press, they are liable to change at short notice. Which is completely beyond our control, so don't go giving us evils.



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA [WORKING TITLE]

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Nintendo

We're sure there can't be a single Cube owner without even the slightest part of their brain reserved for Link's forthcoming adventure, and Nintendo sure knows how to tease us – a few screens every now and again and the fans are bound to be happy. E3 can't come soon enough.



RADIATA STORIES

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: TBC

Even though details are pretty thin on the ground, a recent trawl of the archives – *Vagrant Story* and such – reminded us of the greatness of which Square Enix is capable. All of a sudden, we've found ourselves hankering for this more than most other RPGs. Most odd.



METROID PRIME: HUNTERS

Format: DS
Publisher: Nintendo

After the demo that comes bundled with the DS hardware proved to be more playable and, indeed, enjoyable than we'd hoped, we're now looking forward to the full game. If nothing else, it can't be any worse than the abomination of a multiplayer mode in *Echoes*.



1P 4000

HI 1



Life is gonna be a wa-wow-wee **Shadow Dancer – Mega Drive [Sega] 1989**

GH

SAVE



"BATTLEFIELD 1942 ACTUALLY TURNED OUT BETTER THAN WE COULD HAVE EVER HOPED. WE HAD TO GET ON TOP OF THIS GAME AND MAKE SURE IT WAS JUST AS GOOD THIS TIME AROUND"

LARS GUSTAVSSON, LEAD DESIGNER, DIGITAL ILLUSIONS



BATTLEFIELD 2

FORGET THE BATTLES OF THE PAST – THE TIME IS NOW

Something that gaming has proved without a doubt is that it's far more satisfying to beat a man than a machine. Sure, AI is getting better all the time and you can have a fair old ruck with a computer-controlled enemy if you pump up the difficulty level, but it will never surpass the feeling of competing against an unpredictable human opponent who's using all the tactics and gut instincts that you have too.

One of the games that helped quench this thirst for competition was *Battlefield 1942*. It was by no means perfect: strangely gangly soldiers were frustratingly shot down despite being concealed by supposedly solid turret walls, and some dodgy vehicle physics made you wonder whether it would be safer to take to the battlefield on foot. Despite these problems, back in 2002 few games could match the experience and a huge following soon grew, hungry for war.

A few years later, in an attempt to satisfy this following, *Battlefield Vietnam* appeared. On the whole, it was a little disappointing and many who loved the first game considered it a bit of a letdown. Not because it was any worse than *1942* – it retained all the multiplayer antics that made its forerunner such a joy to play – it just wasn't different enough. The same engine took the same soldiers through a slightly different landscape; if anything it was considered more of an expansion pack rather than a game in its own right. ▷

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: Sweden
PUBLISHER: EA
DEVELOPER: Digital Illusions
RELEASE: Q2 '05
GENRE: Action FPS
PLAYERS: TBC

HISTORY

■ The *Battlefield* series launched in 2002 with *Battlefield 1942*. There have been several add-on packs, but this is the original's true sequel.

CONCEPT

■ Give up reliving battles of old and get involved in a recent conflict. Modern weapons and technology look to make this the best game in the series.



Once you've learned how to target your missiles you'll be blowing up everything that moves.

Now, finally, the 'official' sequel is on its way, and come spring 2005 fans of *1942* look to be in for a treat. Much of the original team has been brought back to work on *Battlefield 2* and from what we've played of the early code it seems set to make *1942* obsolete. A chat with Lars Gustavsson, lead designer at Digital Illusions, reveals that the developer has realised exactly what needed improving and how it plans to make this the greatest *Battlefield* game to date. "I was heavily involved in the creation of *Battlefield 1942*," begins Gustavsson, "though not as the lead designer. I was the producer during the time when *1942* was being created, and looking at that title now, even though it's a complex game with all the different theatres of war – land, sea and air – it's still quite simplistic."

One of the specific areas where the game has been updated has been in the multiplayer, where teamwork has become key to success (and enjoyment). "What we've tried to do is enhance the team-play part," explains Gustavsson. "*Battlefield 1942* was beautiful to play alone on servers, but when you teamed up with good people you had so much more fun and that's what we are trying to encourage now. The possibilities to play alone as a lone wolf with a sniper rifle are still there, but we are very much trying to encourage multiplayer and teamwork."

As well as the enhancements that have been made in certain areas, other tweaks are more general, and are intended to build on the success of the first *Battlefield*. "We've improved many small things that annoyed us before," says Gustavsson. "You can now duck into the turrets of vehicles. It was annoying to get shot there when in real life you'd be in a superior position and be more than likely to survive. The engine being re-written, and improved physics, rendering, network code and sound engine all help to provide a much denser experience than before and we think people are going to be pleased with the results."

Even though Digital Illusions is confident that gamers will appreciate all the changes that have been made, there's still some trepidation over how the game will be received. "Creating this sequel was very hard," says Gustavsson. "*Battlefield 1942* was our first 'baby' and we had high hopes – but you never really know. It actually turned out better than we could have ever hoped. With all the mods and community, we had to get on top of this and make sure it was just as good this time around."

"FLYING A HELICOPTER ANYWHERE BUT INTO THE GROUND IS TOUGH UNTIL YOU GET USED TO THE CONTROLS"

A key difference between *Battlefield 2* and *1942* is *when* you're fighting rather than where. Digital Illusions has opted to bring the series into the present day with the player taking control of the United States, China or the newly formed Middle East Coalition. "We've gone for modern warfare this time," says Gustavsson. "So with all the high-tech weapons it was a tough challenge to keep an element of skill in the game while keeping it fun, but we think we've managed it. It's a case of rock, paper and scissors in many cases: a heat-seeking missile can be evaded by firing a flare, and if you're painted by a tracking missile while inside a tank you can shoot out smoke and try to sneak away. We wanted everyone to stand a chance when on the battlefield."

This modern technology may help to level the playing field (as it were), but the up-to-date setting had to remain fairly non-specific so as not to attract controversy, as Gustavsson explains. "Of course, with *Battlefield 1942* we had help from actual battles and movies – it was history," he

MOD IN SWEDEN

When *Battlefield 1942* was released it arrived with very little support for modders, yet it still managed to accumulate a huge modding community that created miracles with little or no help at all. This time, Digital Illusions wants to give bedroom redevelopers a helping hand. "We built our own in-house development tool that can do anything from animation editing, effects editing and land terra-forming," Gustavsson explains. "Basically, everyone on the team was working with this, and when we launch the game we'll be launching this tool with it to aid the modders and make the game better for everyone." With this technology being released along with game itself we can look forward to getting much more than we originally expected from *Battlefield 2*.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Based in the beautiful yet chilly Swedish capital, Stockholm, development studio Digital Illusions Software was founded in March 2000 as a small, privately held company specialising in developing quality software for Windows.

HISTORY

- **MIDTOWN MADNESS 3** 2003 [Xbox]
- **BATTLEFIELD 1942** 2002 [PC]
- **MOTORHEAD** 1998 [PSone]

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

WAR ON OUR DOORSTEP

BATTLEFIELD 1942 + TIME + COMMANDER = BATTLEFIELD 2

■ Various modes of transport are available, for travelling or target practice.

SERIES PROFILE

■ The *Battlefield* series is now recognised as one of the most successful online multiplayer series ever. Although *Battlefield Vietnam* was little more than an expansion pack, it was still well received and *Battlefield 2* looks set to continue this success.

HISTORY

■ BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM 2004 [PC]
■ BATTLEFIELD 1942 2002 [PC]



■ Digital Illusions insists that despite the familiar settings, *Battlefield 2* does not take place in Iraq.

says. "Now we are dealing with the modern day and we don't want to get into depicting that this is Iraq, we'd rather try to show it like the good old movies like *Where Eagles Dare* and *Kelly's Heroes*."

After a brief play against some of the Digital Illusions team it looks like it may have achieved this goal, as the game manages to keep a certain arcade feel. The new system for leading rockets towards your enemies using the mouse allows for great versatility, and although we were rubbish at first we soon found it possible to guide missiles into enemies through helicopter hatches and barn doors rather than just destroying the odd rock or other inanimate object that we took a dislike to.

As with many games of this type there's a steep leaning curve. New menu options and hot keys all take getting used to, and flying a helicopter anywhere but into the ground is extremely tough until you get to grips with the controls. Once mastered, though, *Battlefield 2* promises to provide a great experience in both enjoyment and mastery. "Of course, it's still arcade-like," says Gustavsson with a smile. "It's all about fun. What we've done this time with the vehicles is that a small bump in the road won't total your vehicle. As long as you land on your wheels you can continue. It's the same for soldiers jumping from buildings. Jumping down from a fair height will only damage you slightly now, whereas in *1942* you were constantly being killed by big drops."

Arguably the most interesting element of *Battlefield 2* is the introduction of the Commander role, a part that's perfect for those strategists out there who just can't seem to handle a weapon, inverted axis or otherwise. The view of the battlefield that the Commander sees is a top-down map of the area with all troops, towns and other landmarks clearly marked. A Commander can suggest means of attack to squads on his team and aid them in their approaching battle. The Commander will be a completely voluntary role and the position wields no real power. His orders don't need to be followed, they're just suggestions – we can see it playing like a RTS where your troops can choose whether to listen to you or not. The reason for the introduction of this mode is not only to provide variety, but to encourage new ways of working as a team.

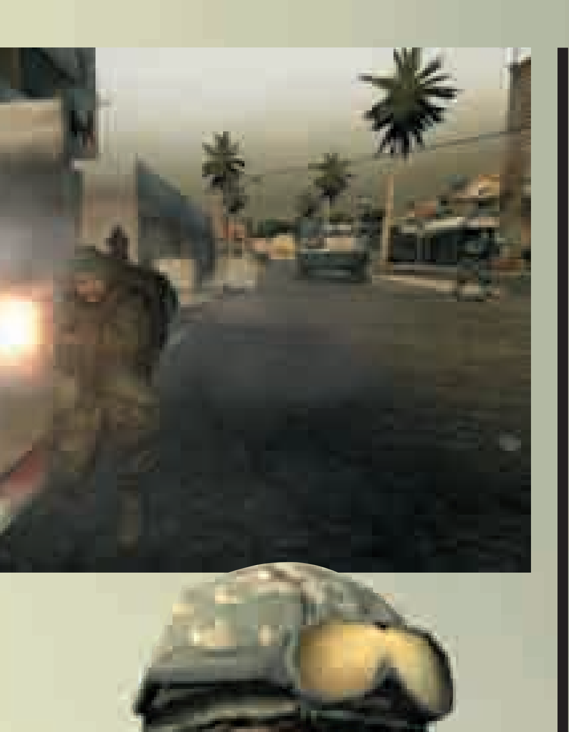
"In *Battlefield 1942* you had two teams and the only way of working together was with the pre-set communication keys," says Gustavsson. "We thought this was very limiting, and since there are more and more players on the servers it was easy to become anonymous. We had the squad system but it was often that all the squads would attack the same target. The Commander is a player who is off the battlefield and in a command room. He can see all the squads in his team, where they are on the map, and there is constant two-way conversation between them. Players can request things from him as he has weapons at his disposal that regular players can't have. For example, if Alpha squad is heading in to attack a base, they can request that their commander send in a surveillance drone or artillery strike to give them an advantage. He can also suggest orders for squads to follow and zoom right down into the action to check out what troops his team can expect to encounter."

With all the improvements in place and working well even at this early stage, *Battlefield 2* stands a good chance of rivalling most other multiplayer experiences and creating the same excitement that *1942* did two years ago.

"MUCH OF THE ORIGINAL TEAM HAS BEEN BROUGHT BACK TO WORK ON BATTLEFIELD 2, AND THIS NEW GAME SEEMS SET TO MAKE 1942 OBSOLETE"

NO 'I' IN TEAM

An area where Digital Illusions has worked hard is keeping the battlefield balanced and ensuring that the mix of fun and realism is just right. "Something we made sure that was kept was the 'vehicle is king' approach," says Gustavsson. "Essentially a vehicle should be able to take out a single man the majority of the time but it's definitely possible for a single soldier to take out a tank if he has the right kit and a bit of luck. The more men there are the less chance the tank will stand of leaving in one piece." With this in mind, teamwork and tactical play will be of paramount importance if you want to take on some of the more dangerous vehicles.



I GET AROUND

As with many war titles, relying solely on your own two feet won't get you very far. So it's nice to see that various transport options are available in *Battlefield 2*, as well as a new option that lets you ask for a little help…

THE TANK

The weapon of choice for those with a craving for destruction. The land vehicles will come in many different forms ranging from light but nippy buggies right the way through to behemoth-like battle tanks. What you drive into battle will greatly depend on what's lying around your spawn point, but each vehicle can now carry other players to man its guns so making sure you pick up a few mates will be the best way to make the most of the firepower you'll have at your disposal. Of course, any passengers you have will suffer the same fate as you should you trundle into an ambush – can you handle that much responsibility?

THE CHOPPER

Although we found them a bugger to control at first, the helicopters will be a great way to get around at speed. Although choppers are vulnerable when taking off and landing, the fact that any passengers can parachute out at any time means they are great way to get into the centre of the action from a direction enemies may not be expecting. You'll be able to pick up a team-mate to use your homing missiles, and with the new mouse controls working so well a bit of practice will see you pin-pointing enemies who think hiding behind a tree will guarantee their safety.

ON FOOT

Obviously the most basic way of getting around but still the favourite of many. No vehicle can give the same versatility that you have when travelling on foot and it's far easier to disappear into the smoky battlefield if you're not speeding around in a Jeep. The stealth advantages are obvious and being a smaller target will mean those irritatingly accurate missiles are more likely to miss their mark. Also, new features will allow you to run and help team members out when they really need you. The downside? One shot in the face and you're dead meat.

SHOUT IT OUT

It's always a good idea to have friends around to help out and this is an idea that *Battlefield 2* has harnessed. A new feature is the ability to yell out to your buddies when you need an item desperately. If you run out of ammo in the middle of a firefight, you can just take cover and cry about it until a friend runs over to you and tops you up. It's the same routine if you accidentally spawn a few miles away from the action and want to hitch a ride on a passing vehicle, or even if you've been shot down and are in desperate need of medical attention – you'll soon find that any helpful medics nearby will be aching to try out their defib equipment on you.

"WITH ALL THE HIGH-TECH WEAPONS IT WAS A TOUGH CHALLENGE TO KEEP AN ELEMENT OF SKILL IN THE GAME WHILE KEEPING IT FUN, BUT WE THINK WE'VE MANAGED IT"

LARS GUSTAVSSON, LEAD DESIGNER, DIGITAL ILLUSIONS

If you don't want to wield weapons like this guy, opt to be a Commander instead.

TIMESPLITTERS: FUTURE PERFECT



VIDEOGAMES MATHS

TIMESPLITTERS 3: SPLITTING TIME, NOT SWEEPING IT

TIMESPLITTERS 2 x BLOOD + VEHICLES = FUTURE PERFECT

"INNOVATIVE 'MEET YOURSELF' TIME TRAVEL GAMEPLAY LETS PLAYERS BE THEIR OWN ALLY BY TEAMING UP WITH PAST AND FUTURE VERSIONS OF THEMSELVES"

EA PRESS RELEASE

Go on – shoot them. It's what *TimeSplitters* does best, so there's plenty of gun fun here.

TIMESPLITTERS: FUTURE PERFECT

PLAYSTATION2/MULTIFORMAT



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Free Radical formed after a group broke away from Rare, with *TimeSplitters* its first release. Since then, the *TimeSplitters* series has gone from strength to strength under the wing of Eidos. *Second Sight* was a departure for Free Radical, being published by Codemasters, before EA snapped up *Future Perfect*.

HISTORY

■ **SECOND SIGHT** 2004 [Multi]
■ **TIMESPLITTERS 2** 2002 [Multi]
■ **TIMESPLITTERS** 2000 [PSone]



DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, Cube
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: EA
DEVELOPER: Free Radical
RELEASE: TBA (US: March '05)
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1-4 (1-16 Live)

CONCEPT

■ Famed FPS series leans towards mature themes with risqué humour and B-movie blood binding this third outing together.

BLOOD, DECAPITATIONS, SEX AND DEATH – TIMESPLITTERS GROWS UP

Adding lashings of blood and adult humour is an easy way to appeal to a mature audience, not to mention whip up controversy and extra column inches for your game. It didn't do *Manhunt*'s sales any harm, but seeing the crimson flow in *TimeSplitters: Future Perfect* makes you realise the series is growing up. The game will ship with an 18 rating and Free Radical is looking to make the most of it.

The developer was faced with two options – get rid of the zombie decapitations and setting people alight or get an 18 certificate. It plumped for the latter, relying on EA's financial muscle to make up for the loss of younger gamers. Gameplay-wise, the addition of blood initially seems shocking as it jars with the roots of the series. *TimeSplitters* has always used exaggerated animation to depict characters under fire, which complemented the cartoon style and tongue-in-cheek humour. But the addition of blood suits the trademark B-movie feel, so purists shouldn't be too worried.

Future Perfect starts where *TimeSplitters 2* ends – Cortez has narrowly escaped into space with the time crystals intact but is forced to make an emergency landing into the midst of a full-scale battle between his allies and more TimeSplitters. You begin the game upside down, dangling from your spacecraft. Your troops help you to your feet, hand you a sci-fi pistol and let you lead the charge.

It's immediately obvious how the *TimeSplitters* series has evolved from the run-and-gun-and-grab of the original to a full-blown single-player experience. The soldiers fighting alongside you have convincing AI, ducking behind scenery and struggling to keep track of TimeSplitters as they zig-zag across cliff-tops. Spacecraft swoop overhead, bridges are blown up and in one spectacular moment the TimeSplitters mothership explodes, all within the first two minutes.

The AI is meant to make each level feel like a complete world and make the environments more convincing, and you're even given an AI buddy. For example, Captain Ash is the team-mate for the assault on Scotland and will provide gunfire and cover while shouting what switches to pull, which gates to open and how to progress. An efficient tour guide might not sound like much of an alternative to a trigger-happy companion but it's surprising how many games get this wrong.

It's still classic *TimeSplitters* gameplay with regards to the speed that the characters move and how quickly gunfire exchanges are resolved but the pace is more considered as there are more sections breaking up the shooting. So far we've given Harry Tipper cover with a sniper rifle, infiltrated enemy bases wearing disguises and, of course, taken part in the obligatory stealth section. Even vehicles have made it into *Future Perfect*, allowing

> "THE ADDITION OF BLOOD SUITS THE SERIES' TRADEMARK B-MOVIE FEEL, SO PURISTS SHOULDN'T BE TOO WORRIED"

LET'S GET PHYSICAL

Melee attacks are a useful addition in single-player but completely change the multiplayer matches. These close-range attacks have allowed Free Radical to extend the reloading animation so the frenetic rhythm of *TimeSplitters 2* deathmatches has become more staccato. Not only is there a greater emphasis on when you reload but also on the merits of delaying reloading to chance a melee attack; the pace is still breakneck but more consideration goes into your ammunition situation before charging in. It works because of the feeling of vulnerability that kicks in once your character reaches for a new ammunition clip, and the power of the melee attacks offers a high-risk, high-reward strategy for those brave enough to chance it.



■ An improved game engine ensures there's plenty of dynamic movement…

■ Typical *TimeSplitters*-esque characters (and nudey women) take the edge off the gore.

TIMESPLITTERS: FUTURE PERFECT



The new multiplayer levels have been enhanced with melee attacks.

you to drive or ride shotgun in an assortment of trucks and Jeeps.

The 18 rating allows Free Radical to indulge in risqué humour alongside an increased body count. One such example is Jo-Beth Casey (now proudly wearing a T-shirt emblazoned with 'Slut') who refuses to be the first to go down a ladder into a basement. A quick glimpse at her skirt, a knowing look to the camera and Cortez cheekily replies, "I'll go". It could be offensive or crude, yet instead feels like a natural extension of the humour *TimeSplitters* suggested but never risked.

Once in that basement, the liberties that an 18 certificate afford become even clearer. Dead bodies hang from the ceiling as the macabre imagery reaches its peak. Drag your gun sight over one of the heads and one shot later the head explodes in a cloud of crimson, the body flopping 10 feet to the ground. What follows is a set-piece that shows how having a partner can heighten tension.

After entering a freezing room full of corpses, the door swings shut behind both characters as bodies stagger back to life. Jo-Beth frantically tries to get the door open while you're charged with keeping the zombies away using a harpoon gun. It's a classic set-up but works surprisingly well, especially given the nuances such as the way zombies still lumber towards you even with a harpoon sticking out of their chest, and Jo-Beth's exaggerated mannerisms as panic sets in.

Future Perfect was shown off in the building that previously hosted the *Second Sight* development team and it seems the ghost of John Vattic lingers on. The Gravity Gun owes an obvious debt to that game, allowing you to pick up barrels and fling them at enemies, with nearby objects tumbling realistically. Its use is more restrained than you might expect and it doesn't seem to have a dramatic impact on the gameplay, yet it's a neat addition that warrants further experimentation. In another showcase of *Future Perfect*'s black humour, you can also use this gadget to pick up a severed head and fling it at a zombie. Gruesome, but sure to raise a smile.

The single-player element of the game looks to be in good hands, which leaves us with the multiplayer. Always considered the strong point of the series, there's a surprising shift in pace as the 'reloading versus melee attacks' dynamic forces a little thought to go along with the haste (see the 'Let's Get Physical' boxout). Nevertheless, the levels are an exercise in tight design. Disco proved an early favourite, with stairways looping onto dance floors and balconies to a funk-lite soundtrack, with no room for running away once health was low.

Subway was notable for the switch tucked away in the higher regions of the level, leaving players who got there exposed but giving them the option to activate trains that run over any vulnerable characters below. Meanwhile, Siberia is a natural evolution of the ice station level in *TimeSplitters 2*, with a vast, open icy arena punctuated by large pillbox towers in its corners and two bunkers by its side.

TimeSplitters: Future Perfect seems entirely comfortable with its knowing adult tone and style, and the core gameplay looks to be improved to include a worthy single-player mode. Even so, it will be interesting to see what gamers make of the changes elsewhere and how long-term fans take to the new package that surrounds the gameplay.

"YOU CAN USE THE GRAVITY GUN TO PICK UP A SEVERED HEAD AND FLING IT AT ZOMBIES. GRUESOME, BUT SURE TO RAISE A SMILE"

X MARKS THE SPOT

The Mapmaker mode has been doubled in size for *Future Perfect*. That alone would guarantee the compulsory improvement-on-original-mode box ticked off the checklist but there's been far more thought and energy put into this often overlooked area of the game. Along with the usual collection of pre-set tiles and lighting effects are switches, gun turrets, patrolling guards and vehicles – enough to make a passable Story mission, and that's exactly the option that's been included, even down to the minor details such as customisable update messages on the mission status. Consider how the gun turrets have adjustable fields of vision and projectiles and it's already obvious how much potential there is to keep idle hands busy.



PUBLISHER PROFILE

First it published *Burnout 3*, now it's publishing *TimeSplitters: Future Perfect* – all part of EA's plan to claw back respectability following a reputation for releasing endless sports updates with superficial changes. The Redwood City firm remains the world's biggest independent developer and publisher.

HISTORY

- **FIFA 2005** 2004 [Multi]
- **ROAD RASH** 1991 [Genesis]
- **M.U.L.E.** 1983 [Multi]

It looks kind of weird having all this blood around, but it works quite well.

"CORTEZ FINDS HIMSELF IN A FRANTIC RACE AGAINST TIME IN A DESPERATE BID TO TRACE THE ORIGIN OF THE TIMESPLITTERS AND SAVE MANKIND"

EA PRESS RELEASE

There are various new gameplay elements but the emphasis is still on shooting.

COLD FEAR



"YOU CAN EXPECT MANY TWISTS IN THE COURSE OF THE EVENTS AS WELL AS MANY STARTLING MOMENTS"

GUILLAUME GOURAUD, CREATIVE DIRECTOR, DARKWORKS

These hideous creatures run across the ceiling before falling down onto their unlucky victim.

COLD FEAR

PLAYSTATION2/MULTIFORMAT

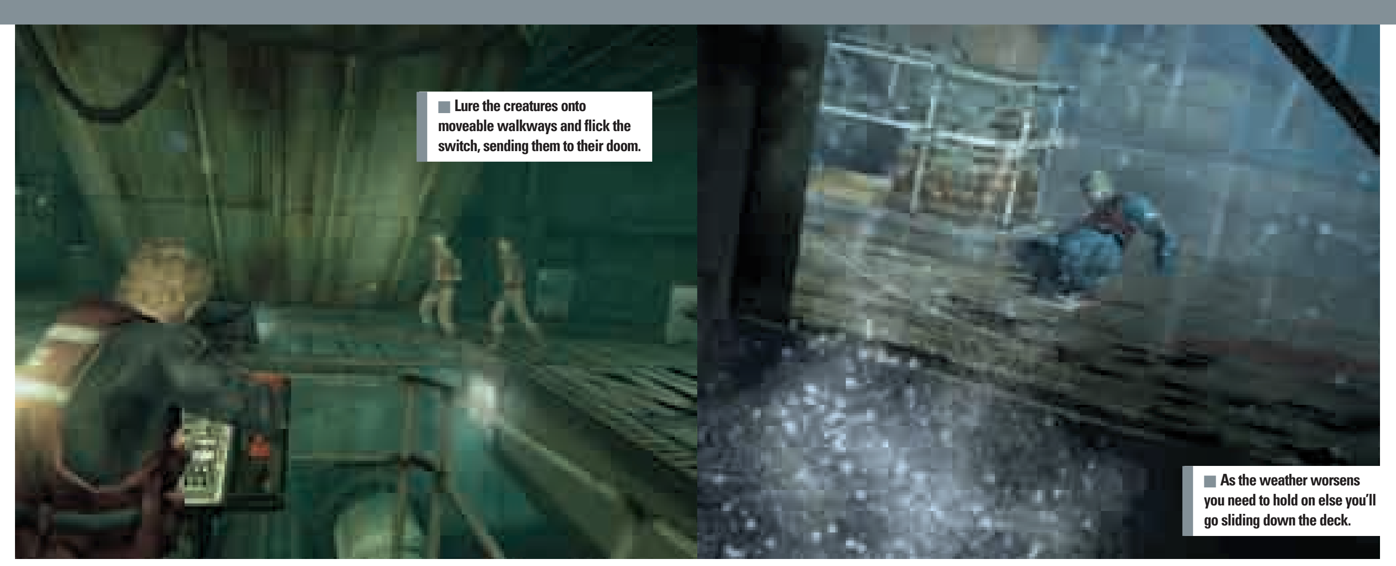


DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Darkworks has already cut its teeth within the survival horror genre as it was responsible for the last instalment in the *Alone In The Dark* series on Sega's late lamented Dreamcast. The game later appeared on the PlayStation2.

HISTORY

■ **ALONE IN THE DARK – THE NEW NIGHTMARE** 2001 [Dreamcast]



■ Lure the creatures onto moveable walkways and flick the switch, sending them to their doom.

■ As the weather worsens you need to hold on else you'll go sliding down the deck.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox
ORIGIN: France
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: Darkworks
RELEASE: March '05
GENRE: Action Horror
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

■ There are nasty goings-on aboard a seemingly abandoned ship. Naturally, there's more to this floating graveyard than meets the eye…

PLENTY OF HORROR, MIXED WITH SOME SERIOUS SEASICKNESS…

***Cold Fear* was always going to face a bumpy ride with us world-weary types.** What we imagined was yet another half-arsed *Resident Evil* wannabe done on a budget and pumped out into an overcrowded market full of far-too-similar titles. Luckily, after a few hours with developer Darkworks we soon discovered that *Cold Fear* does manage to breathe new life into tired ideas – so much so, in fact, that its creators don't even like to use the name survival horror. Instead, *Cold Fear* gets its own bracket: action horror.

What this means is that instead of spending hours trying to find the necessary emblem embedded in a statue, or a key hidden somewhere behind a complex mind puzzle, much of *Cold Fear* merely requires you to stay alive, blasting any zombies that dare to cross your path.

Rather than get an amateur to produce the script for *Cold Fear*, Darkworks turned to popular genre author Richard Dansky, a writer who's most famous for his work with White Wolf and who has penned 140 novels. His style is very cinematic and so perfectly suited to this kind of title. The main character in *Cold Fear* is Tom Hansen, a United States coastguard who's sent to board a Russian ship that's cruising through the Bering Sea. While it initially appears abandoned, that wouldn't make for much of a horror title, would it?

Yes, as expected, something wicked this way comes and whatever those things are, they're certainly not human. The ship is over-run with creatures known as Exorcel that sprint around at high speeds, eradicating anyone who dares to try to stop them. It seems that someone at Darkworks is a huge fan of *Alien*, or at least has a good knowledge of HR Giger's work, as these creatures are hideous.

Not only are the Exorcel an extreme danger on their own, but they also (in what appears to be a homage to the John Carpenter classic *The Thing*) have the ability to enter hosts, bringing seemingly inanimate creatures or corpses back to life. Cue a host of undead creatures lumbering towards you in classic zombie fashion, joined by hordes of fast creatures scuttling around. This double gameplay dynamic of deciding which bad guys to take out first means players will soon find their own way of facing the challenge of *Cold Fear*.

> "MUCH OF THE GAME MERELY REQUIRES YOU TO STAY ALIVE, BLASTING ANY ZOMBIES THAT CROSS YOUR PATH"

Luckily, to destroy these foes you're armed with increasingly effective weapons. At the start of your quest it may be a case of just carrying a simple handgun or shotgun, but survive early attacks and search the ship and you soon come across grenade launchers, a speargun and a flamethrower. Of course, as the weapons get bigger, so do the enemies – as you leave the ship for a nearby oilrig, you'll encounter monsters that stick to the ceiling before dropping down onto you, and later there are invisible menaces that prove to be the ultimate horror…

Cold Fear is not only one of the most impressive horror titles we've seen for a while, it's also one of the bloodiest, although it goes down the B-movie or classic Carpenter route so none of the violence seems too much or gratuitous. In fact, perhaps it was merely because we were so trigger happy and kept blasting away that we saw so much blood.

Cold Fear hits Xbox and PS2 in March, but can it provide a worthy challenge to the Cube's *Resident Evil 4*? We'll see…

HOLD ON!

***Cold Fear*'s setting makes for an interesting and original game dynamic that's very different from other recent horror games. The reason for this is that the sea itself becomes your enemy – you find yourself about to walk to relative safety and then a wave hits the ship, flipping you across the deck and closer to the undead terror, or worse, into the freezing water. It also affects how successful you are when shooting enemies. For example, if you try to shoot straight you'll often find that your shots go way off course, but if you grab hold of a rail before taking aim, you'll be able to get a decent shot. This is simple at the start of the game but as things get more frantic you'll find yourself shooting first and thinking later, making for some mistakes that you may pay for with your life.**

KILLER7

EVERY BAG HAD SEVEN CATS AND EVERY CAT HAD SEVEN KITS

Dwarves, wonders, magnificent people – lots of great things come in sevens, and from the bits and pieces that we're now starting to see of Capcom's *Killer7*, we could well be about to witness another.

When Capcom announced *Killer7* back in 2002 most people sat up and took notice. From the small selection of screenshots available, you were able to get enough of a taster to make you want to learn more. Hugely stylised and disturbing visuals hinted at the 'adult' title GameCube owners were crying out for, and the snippets of story that were drip-fed over the following month gave the impression that we were about to see something unique. As it goes, there was nothing else to see. *Killer7* went into hiding for over a year, leaving gamers to wonder exactly what was going on with this quirky title and whether it would ever actually appear.

Now talk has started once more, and with the spring release date getting closer, new information has become available and *Killer7* is looking just as intriguing as it did before its disappearing act. Those of you who've been following the progress of the game will probably know that you'll be playing as a wheelchair-bound assassin called Harman Smith. Obviously feeling that having to plot, hunt and kill from the confines of a chair isn't quite enough of a hindrance for an assassin of his ability, Harman is also severely psychologically disturbed – so much so that he has seven personalities crammed inside his head that are just itching to climb to the surface and have a pop at killing those on his death list.

These personalities are what make Harman a lethal killing machine and by 'recruiting' them, switching between them and combining their individual attributes you'll find that there are very few people who can escape Harman's murderous intentions. The personalities are a twisted bunch and range from a masked wrestler type right through to a charming young lady who can spray blood at her victims from her recently slashed wrists – lovely.

To provide an adequate challenge for our man Harman, a powerful underworld kingpin known as Kun Lan has unleashed a violent horde called Heaven's Smile. These demonic soldiers – who come complete with horrific Joker-esque smiles that are likely to give most GameCube owners nightmares – are wreaking havoc on the city and are seizing the minds of the populous. Guess who's top of your hit list…

Arguably the most distinctive aspect of *Killer7* has to be its stunning cel-shaded graphics. As a third-person/FPS action adventure title, *Killer7* doesn't exactly lend itself to this style of artwork, so the fact that it seems to have pulled it off wonderfully is all the more notable. Whether it appeals to your taste or not, these visuals are damn impressive and we're really looking forward to seeing them in action.

This said, there are still many unanswered questions regarding *Killer7*'s gameplay, but we're fairly confident that Capcom won't let us down. We'll have more on *Killer7* as we get closer to the release date, but with the knowledge we have so far it seems that there's a good chance that at least one of your personalities should be looking forward to it.

"THE PERSONALITIES RANGE FROM A WRESTLER TO A YOUNG LADY WHO SPRAYS BLOOD AT PEOPLE FROM HER WRISTS"

DETAILS

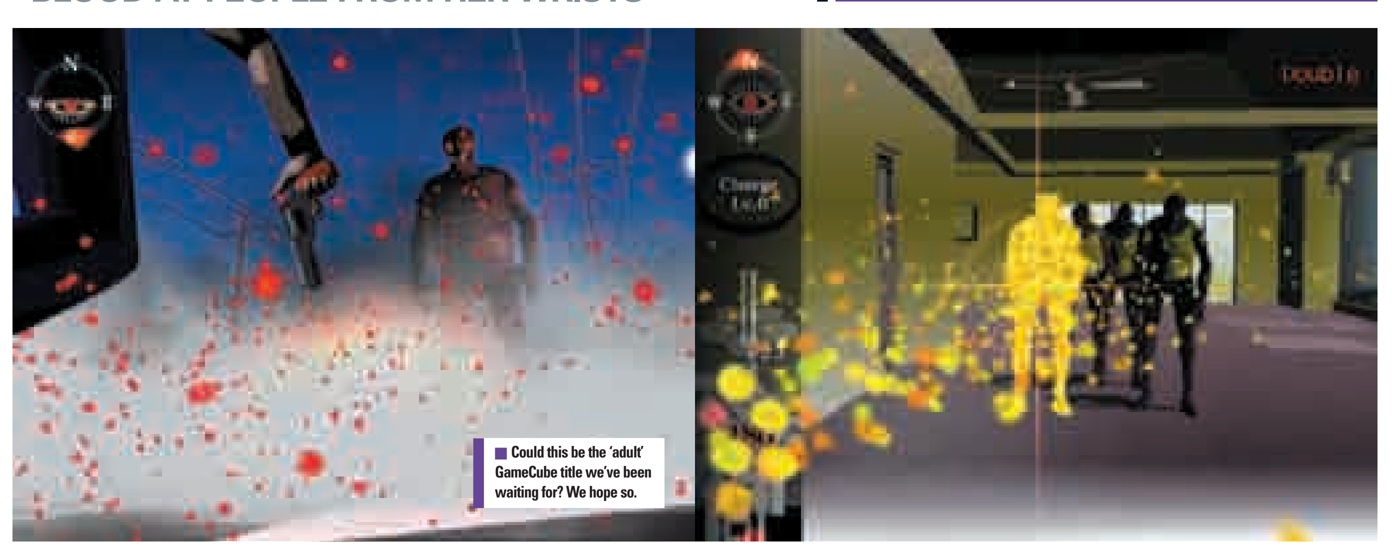
FORMAT: GameCube
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q2 '05
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

By turning his psychological problems to your advantage, lead Harman and his multiple personalities as they attempt to kill a crime kingpin.

OUT OF CONTROL

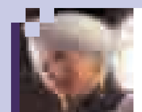
Although much of the game is said to be an FPS, it's the third-person areas that we really want to see. It's been rumoured that the computer will control your character in these areas, with options appearing on the screen for you to choose your next destination. Although this sounds interesting, it could make the game feel rather restrictive. What are we meant to do while our character moves around by himself? Make a cup of tea? Read a good book? Sure, walking through empty hallways can be a bore, but could it prove even more tedious to watch helplessly as a computer walks you through these areas? Little is known about *Killer7*'s gameplay so it's hard to comment on this yet, but it makes you wonder how these ideas will pan out.



Could this be the 'adult' GameCube title we've been waiting for? We hope so.



KILLER7
GAMECUBE



ASSASSIN PROFILE

The life of a hired killer is an exciting one: plotting, hunting and eliminating your target in whatever way best suits your situation. It's thanks to these factors that assassins make it into so many videogames. Gamers will never tire of finding new and exciting ways of killing and disposing of bodies. We can probably expect to see many more in years to come.

HISTORY

- **HITMAN 2** 2002 [Multi]
- **DEAD OR ALIVE 3** 2001 [Xbox]
- **TENCHU** 1998 [PSone]

"KILLER7 IS A STYLISED, POST-MODERN, HARD-BOILED ACTION-ADVENTURE GAME FEATURING VISUAL ARTISTRY AND DARK IMAGERY"

KILLER7 PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

ASSASSINATIONS OF A MADMAN

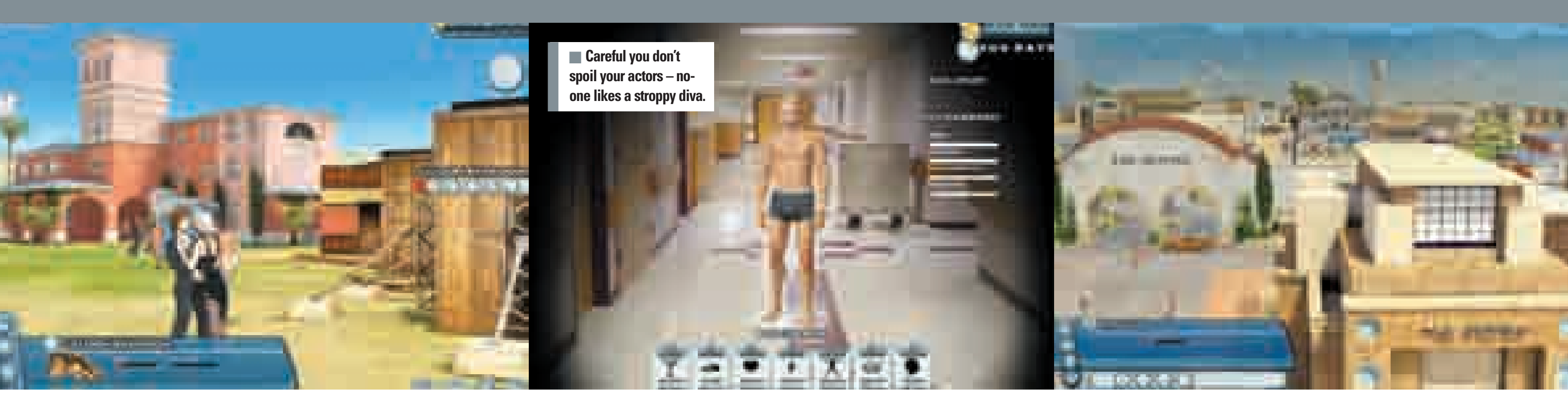
HITMAN + COMICS + MADNESS = KILLER7

Monsters, gore and that smile. The kids are going to be having nightmares.

Each of your personalities will have different abilities that you must use.


eMag

THE MOVIES



Careful you don't spoil your actors – no-one likes a stroppy diva.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, PC, Xbox, GameCube
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Lionhead Studios
RELEASE: Q2 '05
GENRE: Management
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

■ Nurture your movie studio, hire and fire staff, develop the careers – and egos – of actors, and get rich by making some awesome movies.

"FACE IT, YOU'RE ALL WASHED UP – YOU'LL NEVER WORK IN THIS TOWN AGAIN!"

As jobs go, running a movie studio is probably quite a good one. We reckon it has plenty of perks, like good pay, constant parties, free stuff and frequent attention from shallow yet curvy budding starlets. So considering *Crazy Taxi* made a fun game out of a boring job, we're pretty hopeful about what can be done here.

Imagine *The Sims*, but instead of running a household you're looking after a movie studio. This responsibility is divided into three main areas: designing and maintaining your studio, grooming potential stars and actually making movies. If this sounds like too much of a chore there are options that allow you to hire staff and automate certain elements while you can get down to taking care of matters you're actually interested in. So if you want to spend most of your time forging the careers of your actors and making them happy, feel free to hire directors and writers to orchestrate your movies and get further staff to make certain decisions. You can hire and fire people depending on where you want to invest your time and attention.

Spanning the dawn of cinema to beyond the present day, the game lets your studio develop as technology advances, all the while seeing you do what you can to ensure your movies are up to date and able to generate the cash needed to invest in more projects. Before you can make a movie, though, you need actors, and the in-game actors aren't always what they seem. Without proper guidance you could find your big star coming onto the set tired, drunk and abusive. Also, actors have a tendency to get old or fat, something you have to combat to get the desired shelf-life from your biggest names.

You can make all types of film; genres announced so far are action, horror, comedy, romance, sci-fi, western, thriller

"YOU CAN HIRE AND FIRE PEOPLE DEPENDING ON WHERE YOU WANT TO INVEST YOUR TIME AND EFFORT"

and war. Say you're interested in horror, thriller and war, though, we wonder how far the game will let you go in terms of good taste.

Another question with *The Movies* has to be about how success will be judged. The financial side of things is easy, but how good can this game be at rating your success when you've made, say, a comedy – something whose worth is judged by how funny it is? Can Lionhead's new game can judge humour? We're eager to find out.



Surely this sort of set should be filmed indoors? But, hey, your studio…

We're not sure why the characters look like apes. Maybe it's part of the film.


eMag

KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC II: THE SITH LORDS

AN ELEGANT GAME FOR A MORE CIVILISED AGE


Dual-wielding is as empowering and impressive as it ever was.

What do you, as a gamer, ask of a sequel? Are you happy for a follow-up to retread old ground in a slightly tweaked way or would you rather see drastic changes take a series in a different direction? While it's all too easy to be sceptical of the former, the 'if it ain't broke' adage often applies to high-profile sequels and it's easy to see why games like *Halo 2* and, indeed, *The Sith Lords* aren't exactly eager to swerve violently from the path of their forerunners.

The real changes here come not in the fundamentals but in the deeper aspects of the game. Since your character this time is Force-sensitive from the off, there are plenty more Force powers to learn and you really will be able to shape your abilities around the way in which you want to play.

One minor gripe at this stage is with the way the early events and back story are explained – after your ship crashes, you're left with only a few computer terminals to remind you of who you are and what has transpired until the first NPC arrives, even then laying on the information a little thick. This feels rather distant but hopefully the great storytelling of the first game will be reintroduced as the adventure continues.

> "STAR WARS AND NUMBER-CRUNCHING – AN UNHOLY ALLIANCE, PERHAPS, BUT ONE THAT CERTAINLY WORKS"

Those who played *KOTOR* will recall the Jedi class system, offering Sentinel, Guardian and Consular paths depending on your style. This has been deepened with six additional sub-classes (three for each Light and Dark side) and it looks as though rather than shy away from the challenge of developing this sequel, new boys Obsidian Entertainment (a dream amalgamation of ex-*Fallout*, *PlaneScape*, *Baldur's Gate* and *Icewind Dale* staff) have taken to it with commitment and passion.

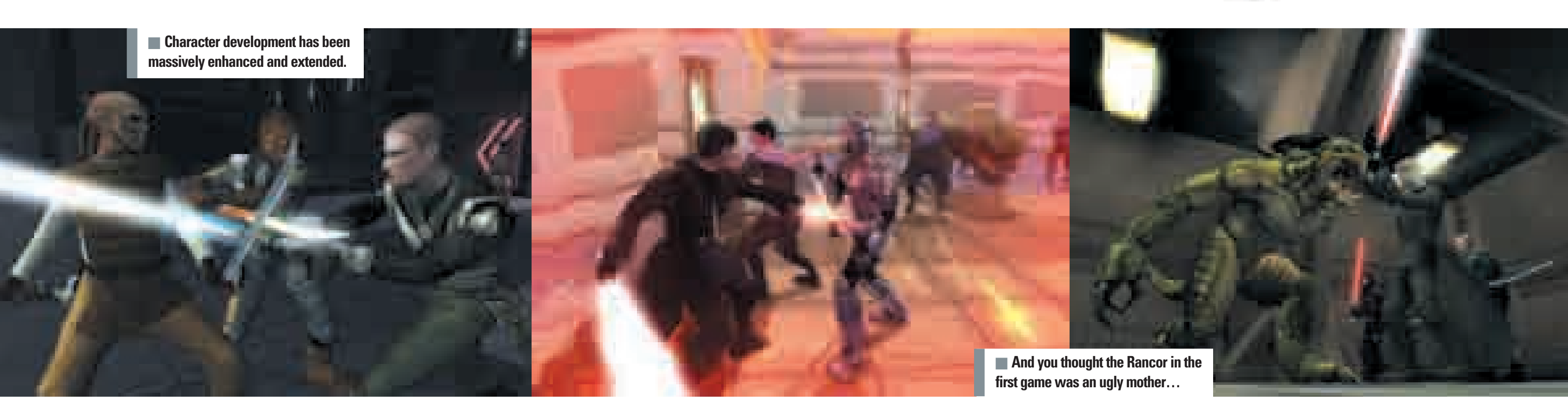
Aside from that, there's not a great deal to reveal; it's all about the simple upgrades to practicality and continuations of what made the first game great. Weapon switching and using powers during battles has been made simpler (although you can still pause the action to contemplate your next move in peace) and anyone who got a kick out of seeing their own tale of heroism or villainy play out in the *Star Wars* universe will undoubtedly see their excitement renewed in February.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Obsidian
RELEASE: Feb '05 (US: Out Now)
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

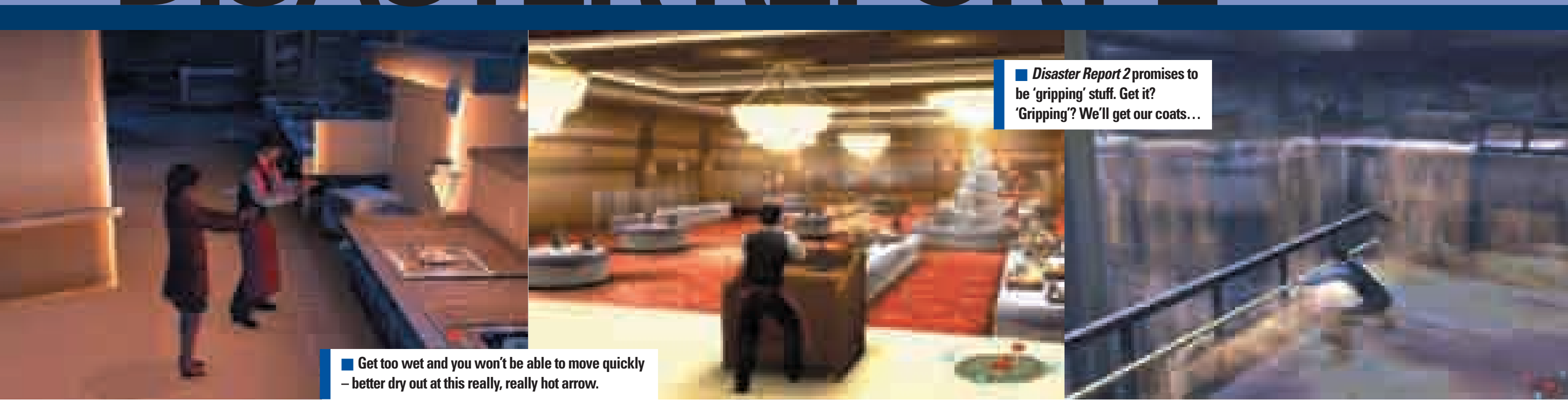
Grab your Lightsaber and prepare for more RPG joy.


Character development has been massively enhanced and extended.

And you thought the Rancor in the first game was an ugly mother…


eMag

DISASTER REPORT 2



Disaster Report 2 promises to be 'gripping' stuff. Get it? 'Gripping'? We'll get our coats…

Get too wet and you won't be able to move quickly – better dry out at this really, really hot arrow.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: TBC
DEVELOPER: Irem
RELEASE: TBA (Jap: Q1 '05, US: Q2 '05)
GENRE: Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

Remember *SOS: The Final Escape*? The team behind it is back with another disaster to escape, this time an underground flood.

NOT MUCH HAS CHANGED BUT THEY LIVE UNDERWATER

It's amazing how developers try to scare you with 50-foot demons, silly zombies and dark Martian mines when there are so many terrifying things closer to home: inept world leaders or Acclaim trying to come back from the dead, for example. There's even the threat of natural disaster, which isn't something us Brits really have to worry about until our island sinks. Admittedly, games like *Operation Flashpoint* and *SOS: The Final Escape* neatly capture the terrors of mortality or an earthquake but the simplicity of filling a game with cheap scares (*Doom 3*, take a bow) often takes precedence. As such, you might glance at these screens and feel less fearful than you ever have before. But trust us – when it all kicks off, you'll really start to wish you'd brought those armbands.

"YOU'LL BE FIGHTING NATURE ITSELF IN A DESPERATE BID FOR SURVIVAL. JUST DON'T WIND IT UP TOO MUCH…"



"So this is where the pretty boy and the pig-girl from *Big Brother*, like, did it, huh? Cool."

Irem's unexpected sequel replaces the earthquakes of the original game with an even greater disaster: the underground Geocity turns out to be a less than awesome idea when torrential rain in the city above exploits serious design oversights and the subterranean settlement starts filling with water. And so your perilous escape begins.

Much like the first game's Thirst meter and visible clothing damage, *Disaster Report 2* keeps track of how wet you get, which dictates movement rates and health. You'll need to dry out at designated heating points (like an abandoned stove or a fire) and change your clothes at regular intervals in order to stay dry, healthy and, moreover, alive. There will also be plenty of times when you need to brave the waters – swimming makes getting around easier but if you find a strong current or treacherous area you'll have to use your surroundings to keep your head above water.

As before, it's the unpredictability that will keep you on the edge of your seat; you never know when an entire area might fall to pieces, a huge wave will sweep in or a shower of debris could pour from the city above. But *Disaster Report 2* will feature a lot of elements like those that survived the earthquake – the backpack inventory system, the city in tatters, and the other survivors who will either save your life or betray you at some point in the game.

There's no word yet on who, if anyone, will pick up the game for a PAL release, but in a sick, strange way we can't wait to see our virtual lives hang in the balance once more.

BOILING POINT: ROAD TO HELL



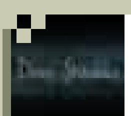
■ Once you find a vehicle, exploring and finding important locations is less of a chore.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

"THIS AIN'T NO UPWARDLY MOBILE FREEWAY..."

FAR CRY + DEUS EX + FREEDOM = BOILING POINT: ROAD TO HELL

> **"BOILING POINT IS A NEW GAMING CONCEPT, COMBINING ACTION AND INTERACTION IN A VAST AND SEAMLESS GAMING WORLD"**
>
> *DEEP SHADOWS WEBSITE*



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Established in Russia when a select group of developers left GSC Gameworld, Deep Shadows is quickly making itself known in PC circles with some of the most impressive coding we've seen. If it continues to create titles as technically stunning as *Boiling Point* looks set to be, this could be one to watch in coming years.

HISTORY

■ **CODENAME: OUTBREAK 2001 [PC]**



DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: Russia
PUBLISHER: Atari
DEVELOPER: Deep Shadows
RELEASE: March '05
GENRE: Shoot-'Em-Up
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

■ Throw together the best bits of current first-person shooters, a few RPG elements and one of the biggest game worlds ever put in front of a player and you'll get something like *Boiling Point*, one of our new-found picks for 2005.

SO HOT YOU COULD FRY AN EGG ON IT

If you spend £2,500 on a gaming PC, you want to see things that console kids and those unwilling to upgrade can never witness. A beautiful title like *Doom 3* or *Half-Life 2*, for instance, running at maximum resolution with every option cranked up to full is a sight that most gamers will never get to see, so it's always great to see a developer using the vast potential of PC gaming for something other than just aesthetics. A massive number of characters on-screen at once, games with so many controls that a keyboard is the only option or, in this case, a ridiculously huge and detailed game world are all things that console games struggle to do well. So much so, in fact, that the overwhelming scale of *Boiling Point* took us by surprise…

Boiling Point's USP is its expansive, free-roaming world and lack of loading times. The insane draw distance and detail are reminiscent of Ubisoft's wonderful *Far Cry*, only somehow Deep Shadows has managed to create hundreds of uninterrupted square kilometres of Colombia, in much the same way as GSC Gameworld is recreating the Chernobyl area for the forthcoming *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.*.

Both games look scarily ambitious next to most other shooters on the market – even the mighty *Half-Life 2* seems limited in scope next to the sprawling terrain and potential of *Boiling Point*'s open world.

All too often when this kind of scale and freedom is offered you'll see very little of interest aside from a few key landmarks. Not so here, as most buildings can be explored and many people interacted with; even the relatively barren areas are detailed and interesting enough to hold your attention.

As in the real world, you'll need money to keep stocked up on the essentials – food and water are obviously vital but given that hero Saul is on a mission to rescue his missing daughter, he'll also need to make sure he doesn't run out of weapons, ammo and medical supplies. But in a game so grounded in reality as this, you don't have to delve into your pockets – a well-placed bullet can grant you access to all the treats money doesn't need to buy, from a bottle of Coke to a new car, as long as you're willing to face the consequences.

Aside from its massive scale, *Boiling Point* isn't really breaking any new ground in the FPS genre. Inventory management and item upgrading are nods in *Deus Ex*'s general direction, forest areas really have a *Far Cry* feel about them, and vehicular elements have more in common with *Grand Theft Auto* than any existing shooter. But as *Halo* and its sequel have proved so well, some of the best games become so by pulling together the finest elements the genre has to offer and mimicking or improving on them.

We've only had a chance to try out early code, but even at this stage it's safe to say that *Boiling Point* is one to keep an eye on – 2005 doesn't have a vast amount of great titles lined up just yet so there should be room on your radar for a couple of relative unknowns.

"A BULLET CAN GRANT YOU ACCESS TO ALL THE TREATS MONEY DOESN'T NEED TO BUY"

FACTION MAN

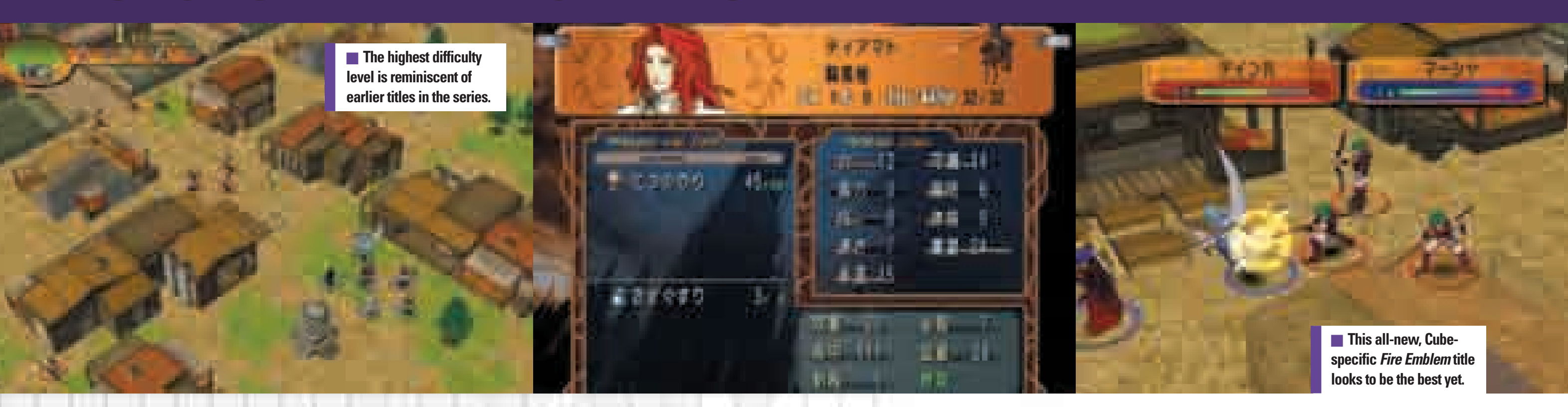
With *Boiling Point*'s Colombian setting as populated as it is, it's good to see that NPCs act both on an individual and a group-oriented basis. Characters fall into one of several categories, be it Mafia, militia or just the general public. Like in *Star Wars Galaxies* (among other games), your every action will affect your status with these different groups and you can easily make allies or enemies in a matter of seconds. Of course, a lesser annoyance will only result in a few guys harassing you but start blowing things up or massacring one particular faction and you may find yourself in the middle of a full-scale war.



■ Knowing what to use in different situations is the key to survival.

■ We're told you can finish the game without killing anyone. But what fun is that?

FIRE EMBLEM: SOUEN NO KISEKI



The highest difficulty level is reminiscent of earlier titles in the series.

This all-new, Cube-specific *Fire Emblem* title looks to be the best yet.

DETAILS

FORMAT: GameCube
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Intelligent Systems
RELEASE: TBA (Japan: Q1 '05)
GENRE: Strategy RPG
PLAYERS: 1-4

CONCEPT

In its first home appearance since the days of the SNES, *Fire Emblem* is back to save our brains from a string of mindless collect-'em-ups.

I AM THE GOD OF HELLFIRE AND I BRING YOU…

In a market where us poor PAL gamers are often left begging for scraps from the NTSC table, it's always nice to have something so import-friendly as the GameCube on hand. Precious few consoles have been able to play games from any region quite so easily, and when the GameCube shelves of our shops look likely to fall quiet for a few months, buying from abroad can be the only way to stop the little purple console gathering dust.

So with *Advance Wars* off receiving all manner of undeserved punishment from Kuju before its Cubic release, we're left to pin all our strategic hopes on *Fire Emblem*. Fans of the series will already know how the two aesthetically similar GBA gems differ – while *Advance Wars* is the simplistic all-tactics strategy game, *Fire Emblem* has far more depth, a lengthy and twisting story wrapped around strategy battles, and RPG-style progression.

The choice to stay true to its origins is a wise one, and without any real thought-provoking titles (besides the *Pikmin* games) on the Cube this can't really fail to win over those for whom the concept of *Cube Wars* has been forever ruined.

It looks as though Nintendo may have finally realised that regurgitating old titles with slightly shinier graphics could only work for so long – this new *Fire Emblem* looks to be the most involving yet. New features like discovering your warriors' 'Hidden Purpose' to imbue them with new powers or sitting down with three mates for an almighty ruck will be complemented by greater unit variety, allowing all manner of aerial units and even morphing Skinshifters to be used. Intelligent Systems is really on a roll and while changes have certainly been made, this won't differ from traditional *Fire Emblem* laws and progression enough to be worrisome.

Having only recently got into the *Fire Emblem* series (and been back to see what we missed during the 16-bit era), we're obviously eager to see how this next-gen version turns out. With Europe still bereft of anything remotely *Fire Emblem*-ish (with the exception of a few cameos in *Super Smash Bros Melee*), a PAL release is still up in the air. Looks like there's never been a better time to pick up a FreeLoader.

> "WHILE CHANGES HAVE BEEN MADE, GAMEPLAY WON'T DIFFER FROM TRADITIONAL FIRE EMBLEM LAWS AND PROGRESSION ENOUGH TO BE WORRISOME"



Look familiar? Movement rates and suchlike also adhere to traditional strategy rules.


eMag

GRAN TURISMO 4



Soon everyone will be able to create beautiful shots of cars in bamboo thickets.

Okay, it's not an in-game racing angle, but look how nice that scenery looks…

IS A PICTURE WORTH A THOUSAND MEGAPIXELS?

PS2 **Given the racing genre's current predilection for pimped rides, nitrous and online functionality, *GT4*'s tardiness puts the revolutionary series in the once unthinkable position of seeming a little quaint.** And this fits with producer Kazunori Yamauchi's manifesto for the series. As the *Gran Turismo* product summary puts it: "The origins of the words 'gran turismo' take us back into the 17th and 18th Century where European aristocrats travelled long distances across the continent in horse-drawn carriages. The key word for *GT4* is 'the heart of a traveller' and the latest game includes breathtaking locations of cities from around the world." Right.

Those familiar with the tracks in *GT4 Prologue* will attest to their picturesque nature, especially the Grand Canyon and Citta di Aria courses. It seems there's plenty more where that came from, with the Costa di Amalfi and George V circuits presenting the coastal area of Spain and the Arc de Triomphe in a manner that must delight their respective tourist boards.

Gamers won't need a passport to create an album of holiday snaps, though – Photo mode is the perfect complement to the complete 'automotive experience' that Yamauchi wants to deliver. Offering a selection of some of the prettier locations, two options are available – a static shot, or Photo Drive for more dynamic images. SLR camera-style functions ensure maximum control of pictures, including zoom, aperture and angle adjustment. A number of filters can also be added for extra artistic effect. Most intriguing of all is the ability to print each 1.2-megapixel image on a compatible USB printer.

Another excursion from driving is the game's B-Spec mode, once again bringing the game's startling aesthetics to the fore by being played out from replay angles; the player acts in the manner of a race team manager, instructing an AI driver on how to race. Possible instructions include how aggressively they should be driving, when to overtake and when to pit. As modes go it's unlikely to placate anyone pining for Network play but it complements the other elements of Yamauchi's automotive vision.

Of course, this vision would be for naught if the racing had all the flair of a Winnebago. Thankfully, Polyphony Digital has spent the period since *Concept* further tweaking car handling and physics, culminating in the inclusion of a new G-Force meter (see boxout). The sense of speed won't worry anyone honing their reflexes on *Burnout 3*, but is perfectly in line with the game's simulation credentials and more than adequate enough to cause palpitations if approaching bends at speed.

Our only cause for concern lies with opponent AI, which Yamauchi has stated is less aggressive than previous games in the series. With a maximum of five other cars on a circuit AI will be paramount for keeping the player under the necessary pressure. Sadly, a spot of errant path-finding causing cars to mount curbs and collide into rear bumpers is evident – so much for less aggressive. This also has the nasty side effect of drawing attention to the game's lack of damage modelling.

Still, the code we played had the now redundant Network race option on the menu screen, so it's not unlikely that changes are planned for the AI before release. Damage will have to wait until *GT5*. Or *6*…

"B-SPEC MODE ONCE AGAIN BRINGS THE GAME'S AESTHETICS TO THE FORE BY BEING PLAYED OUT FROM REPLAY ANGLES"

DETAILS

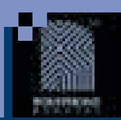
FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: SCEI
DEVELOPER: Polyphony Digital
RELEASE: 23 Feb '05
GENRE: Racing
PLAYERS: TBC

CONCEPT

This fourth iteration of *Gran Turismo* is now somewhat less eagerly awaited after news its online mode has been canned.

CAN YOU FEEL THE FORCE?

Nestling at the bottom of an already congested HUD is the game's newest addition – a G-Force meter, its inclusion arousing suspicions that Yamauchi has admired Konami's *Enthusia Racing*. Whether it has greater function than veering from left to right with the shift of the car hasn't been confirmed, though there is speculation that it will form an intrinsic part of new licence tests, requiring the player to keep the G-Force meter within a fixed boundary. If it's to serve much of a purpose during races it will surely take getting used to – it's easy to monitor when the player has the brief respite of a long straight or has a fixed line through a corner, but is difficult to pay attention to when there's the small matter of a chicane to negotiate.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Though synonymous with the *Gran Turismo* series, Polyphony Digital has also been responsible for *Omega Boost*, not to mention two *Motor Toon Grand Prix* titles under its old guise, Polys Entertainment. Now the company seemingly exists to realise Yamauchi's automotive dreams.

HISTORY

- **GRAN TURISMO 4: PROLOGUE** 2004 [PS2]
- **GRAN TURISMO 3: A-SPEC** 2001 [PS2]
- **GRAN TURISMO** 1998 [PSone]

"GRAN TURISMO 4 IS MUCH MORE THAN A GAME – IT IS A UNIQUE ONE-STOP SHOP FOR AUTOMOTIVE AND RACING ENTHUSIASTS"
AMI BLAIRE, DIRECTOR OF PRODUCT MARKETING, SCEA

VIDEOGAMES MATHS
TAKING A LOOK UNDER THE BONNET

GRAN TURISMO 3 + RACING MANAGER - ONLINE = GRAN TURISMO 4

The in-game footage is almost as polished as these renders. Believe.

TEKKEN 5



Here, coins scatter as you or your opponent gets kicked into them. A nice touch.

"WITH TEKKEN 5, GENUINE STEPS HAVE BEEN MADE TO CORRECT PAST WRONGS"

DETAILS

FORMAT: Arcade, PS2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Namco
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q1 '05 (PS2: Q2 '05)
GENRE: Beat-'em-up
PLAYERS: 1-2

CONCEPT

The fifth in the series promises to make up for the dreadful *Tekken 4*.

NAMCO'S TEKKEN A GOOD HARD LOOK AT ITSELF

In our previous preview of *Tekken 5* we were highly sceptical of the merit of this title. It just looked the same as all the rest, albeit with an all-new extravagant storyline to back up the otherwise rudimentary proceedings. However, we're a little more excited about it now, and if you've ever liked a *Tekken* game, you should be too.

While *Tekken 5* doesn't look too different to previous outings at first glance, and while Namco managed to alienate Jin fanboys after completely screwing him for his *Tekken 4* outing by making him cheesy and rubbish, *Tekken 5* is on course to be the best in the series yet. This is said of all sequels – after all, no-one will try to sell an update by saying the game's 'more of the same' or 'a bit pump but fans will like it' – but with *Tekken 5* genuine steps have been made to correct past wrongs.

Namco takes *Tekken* seriously. Each year it holds a tournament where the world's *Tekken* elite batter it out for pride and prizes, and it was at the latest Evolution 2004 competition that Namco rolled out a half-finished prototype of *Tekken 5* in order to garner opinion and advice from the world's most accomplished *Tekken* players.

And by the looks of things, the view is that *Tekken 5* needs to be nearer *Tekken 3* than *4*. The combo system has been revamped to ensure many of the combos from *Tekken 4* now don't work (or at the very least can be fairly defended against), you can't manoeuvre yourself prior to the round starting, and certain moves deemed cheesy or simply crap have been removed entirely. The result is a game that (expectedly) doesn't intend to change the series dramatically, but aims to tweak it to the point where the balance and flair are thing that make it easily the best *Tekken* game yet.

Despite initial cynicism and the unshakeable fact that this is *Tekken* upgraded rather than *Tekken* with fundamental additions, we're quite looking forward to playing this. After really enjoying *Tekken*s *1* to *3*, and being crushingly disappointed with *4*, we're eagerly, yet slightly warily, awaiting our chance to play the fifth game in the series. We live in hope.



Asuka will no doubt equal both Jun and Jin in terms of fighting flair.

As players get smashed into the ground, the floor may shatter with the impact.


eMag

SHOWCASE

MORE THINGS TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

COLIN MCRAE RALLY 2005

CODEMASTERS GETS RALLY, RALLY SMALL

Format: PSP
Origin: UK
Publisher: Codemasters
Developer: Six By Nine
Genre: Racing
Players: 1



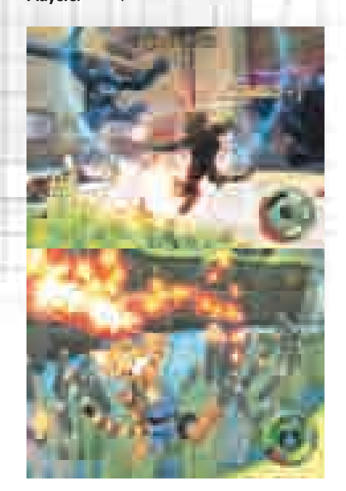
While there's no denying that *Colin McRae Rally* (like the man himself) was once the leader in its field, the franchise has become somewhat stale as of late. Hopefully, then, the move from next-generation console to Sony handheld will do Codemasters some good; with Six By Nine (the studio responsible for the last three PC renditions of the series) in the, er, driving seat, the publisher has the chance to start afresh. Visually, the game appears impressive so far (although it's not quite up to the standard of Namco's *Ridge Racers*) while the promise of over 30 cars and a wide range of events, cups and tournaments should be enough to get any rally fan excited. We just hope it's not the same game all over again.

RELEASE DATE: MARCH '05

LEGEND OF KAY

NINJAS WITH A CAPITAL 'ME-OW'

Format: PlayStation2
Origin: Germany
Publisher: JoWood
Developer: In-House
Genre: Action/Adventure
Players: 1



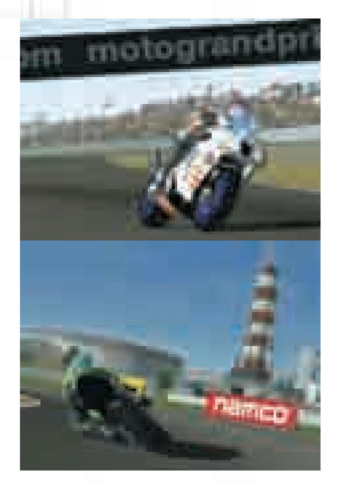
First time-sweeping, now expert ninja skills; clearly, cats are more ingenious than they let on. Unsurprisingly, though, the same can't be said for *Legend Of Kay*, a game that appears to pinch more than a few ideas from other action-based platform adventures and spin them together into a solid, if slightly generic title. Admittedly, the game looks like it has much of what you could ask for – plenty of kung fu-inspired moves, a variety of worlds set in the most obvious of places, several large boss battles and so on – but with everything from *Ty The Tasmanian Tiger 2* to *I-Ninja* already covering all the bases, it's hard to see what will make *Legend Of Kay* stand out from the competition.

RELEASE DATE: FEB '05

MOTOGP 4

ON YER BIKE, MY SON

Format: PlayStation2
Origin: Japan
Publisher: SCEE
Developer: Namco
Genre: Racing
Players: 1-2 (Online TBA)



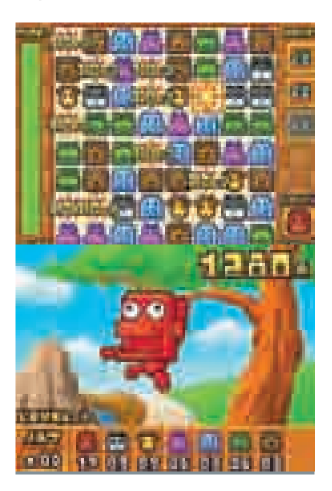
While certainly not quite as regular as some franchise instalments (EA, we're looking at you), the arrival of yet another *MotoGP* game from Namco should come as no surprise. This time around, though, there are some fairly significant differences on top of the newly added circuits, teams and riders – not least the introduction of two new classes of bike (125cc and 150cc) that increase the challenge of the racing for those that need it. However, we suspect that it'll be the addition of an online racing mode (catching up with Climax's Xbox *MotoGP* game at long last) that Sony will shout from the rooftops, if only because it's the only major difference between this and the previous efforts.

RELEASE DATE: SPRING '05

ZOO KEEPER

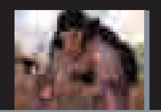
YOU CAN COME TOO, TOO, TOO

Format: DS
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Ignition Entertainment
Developer: Success Corporation
Genre: Puzzle
Players: 1-2



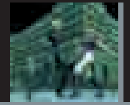
Just as *Tetris* proved to be the killer app for the Game Boy, so we wouldn't be surprised if *Zoo Keeper* does the same on the DS, if the game's popularity in Japanese arcades is anything to go by. As you'd expect for a fiercely addictive puzzler, the concept is simple: animals appear on a grid on the lower touch screen and it's your job to line up matching rows or columns of three or more, simply by switching them round with the stylus. It's as frantic as they come, with the constantly decreasing time limit only rising as you match animals… something that gets progressively tougher as the levels go on. It's certainly basic, but any game that makes good use of the DS's abilities is fine by us.

RELEASE DATE: MARCH '05



CANNED – BC [Xbox]

■ Despite looking promising when we covered it in issue 22, Intrepid's caveman adventure has now been 'suspended' by Lionhead, although the developer hopes to 'revive the project at a later date'.



DELAYED – THE MATRIX ONLINE [PC]

■ It's hardly the biggest delay ever, but the chance of a simultaneous worldwide release for Monolith's MMORPG is gone thanks to Sega Europe's decision to release *MxO* in early February – three weeks after the US launch.

FIFA STREET

FOOTBALL GOES ALL HIPPETY-HOPPETY

Format: PS2/Xbox/Cube
Origin: Canada
Publisher: EA Sports BIG
Developer: EA Canada
Genre: Sports
Players: 1-4



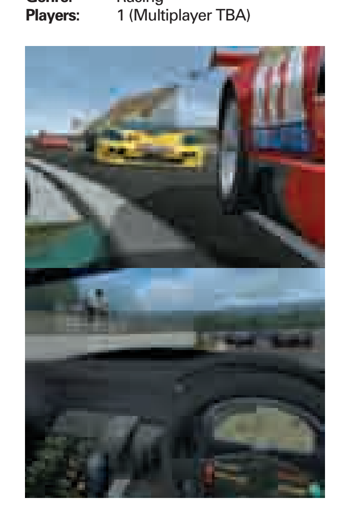
Honestly, is there no sport that EA can't 'street'? It certainly seems that way, although we'd pay good money to see it try something like kabaddi or tiddlywinks. Still, the inevitable excursion into no-rules football – complete with realistic player likenesses thanks to EA's FIFA licence – is one that we await with some interest. Boiling things down into four-on-four action and throwing in typical Sports BIG concepts such as global street-based venues, various special moves and even Gamebreakers, it all sounds rather like a FIFA-based version of *Sega Soccer Slam* to us. Of course, the fact that Wayne Rooney plays a prominent role might make it more popular (or not, as the case may be).

RELEASE DATE: TBA '05

GTR

NOW WITH REAL ASPHALT SMELL

Format: PC
Origin: Sweden
Publisher: Atari
Developer: SimBin
Genre: Racing
Players: 1 (Multiplayer TBA)



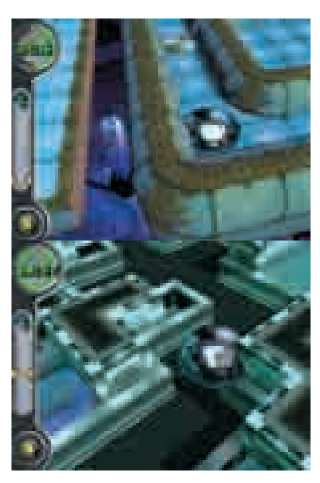
And you thought that *Gran Turismo 4* was pushing the idea of realistic racing to the limit. Atari would like to disagree, having just added a highly polished racer by the name of *GTR* to its portfolio. Based upon the FIA GT, a series of races in which drivers compete in the most powerful sports cars imaginable, everything has been done to ensure the game offers a realistic experience – real car models, track designs, audio samples taken from the cars' real-life counterparts and so on. It even features head-tracking technology, meaning players can 'look' around their car's interior (if they've got the right equipment, of course). With a release just around the corner, though, we're rather more interested in how well it plays.

RELEASE DATE: FEB '05

MERCURY

IF SWALLOWED, CALL A DOCTOR

Format: PSP
Origin: UK
Publisher: Ignition Entertainment
Developer: Awesome Studios
Genre: Puzzle
Players: 1



Forget snooker or pool – it looks as though the future for Archer Maclean lies with liquid metal. Putting Maclean's reputation for top-notch physics to good use, *Mercury* stands out as *Marble Madness* for the next generation of handhelds, requiring perfect reflexes to match that problem-solving mind. The game's set on a multitude of maze-like stages, with players guiding blobs of mercury through to the exit by 'tilting' the level and watching the liquid metal react. Overcoming obstacles will often require you to split your blob into multiple pieces to hit switches or open gates. What we've seen so far looks promising, although it's a shame that the game won't make use of a genuine tilting mechanism (à la *Kirby Tilt 'N' Tumble*) to play.

RELEASE DATE: MARCH '05

PHANTOM KINGDOM

I AIN'T AFRAID OF NO GHOST

Format: PlayStation2
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Nippon Ichi
Developer: In-House
Genre: RPG
Players: 1



Our desire for more Nippon Ichi games continues unabated, thanks mainly to the announcement of its latest title, *Phantom Kingdom*. As the name suggests, the game is a follow-up to *Phantom Brave* although the story stands up on its own through a somewhat darker twist: taking on the role of Xeta the demon king, the goal is to help yourself regain your original form in order to destroy your enemies. While the battle system will be familiar to fans of other Nippon Ichi titles, the developer has introduced a new summon spell system called Invite which allows you to bring additional troops to the field if you need reinforcements; a subtle change, but one that should enhance the turn-based combat no end.

RELEASE DATE: TBA '05

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He ain't heavy, he's my brother **Bonanza Bros – Mega Drive [Sega] 1990**


ISSUE 20
ISSUE 24
ISSUE 16
ISSUE 26



Another year older, another year wiser

WE TAKE A TEARY EYED LOOK AT THE LAST 12 MONTHS IN GAMING

A lot can happen in a year. It's only when you look back that you realise quite how much. So many games have been released in 2004, and some feel like they're been around for ages – *Far Cry, SOCOM II, Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow*… are they really only a year old? We've seen so many quality releases in the past year it's hard to believe they all hail from the same 12-month period. So what could possibly happen in 2005 to better the amazing quality of *Burnout 3, Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* and *Halo 2*? After all, the follow-ups to these big hitters probably won't appear in 2005. With this in mind, the coming year will be all about new hardware. As well as two new handheld consoles, we're expecting big announcements from Sony, Microsoft and perhaps even Nintendo regarding their next generation of home console. But for now, it's all about the memories, so turn the page to relive 12 excellent months.

January / February / March

AFTER A SLOW START TO 2004, SOME QUALITY TITLES SOON GET THINGS GOING



ISSUE 15

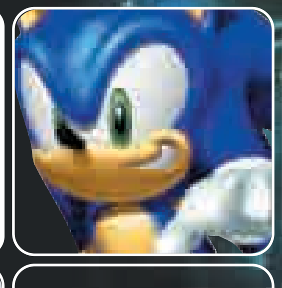
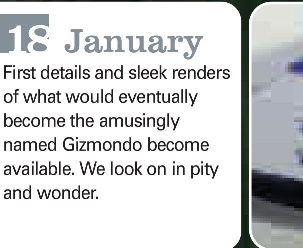
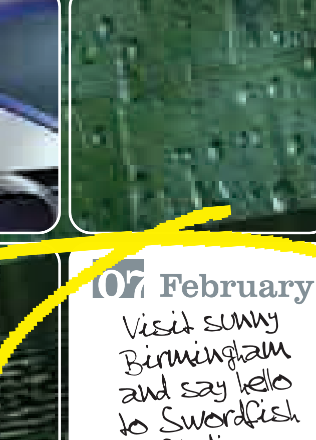
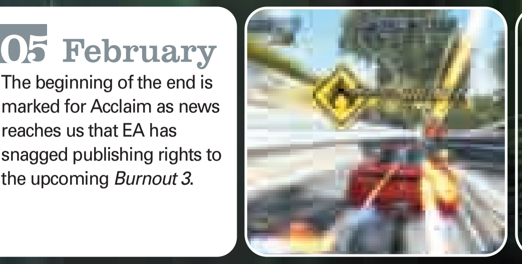
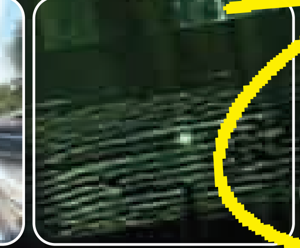
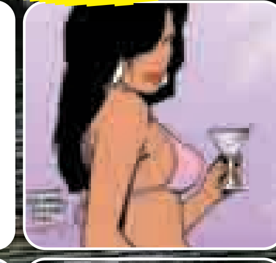
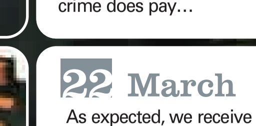
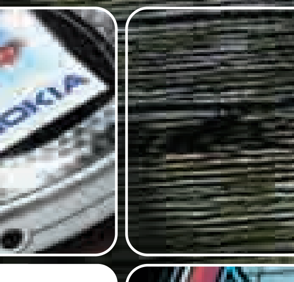
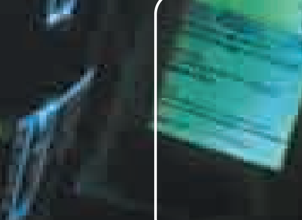
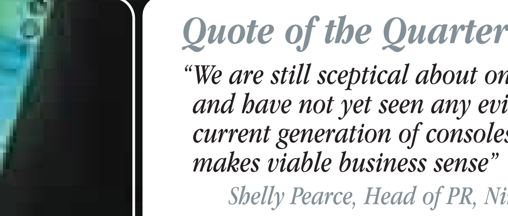
games™ goes retro with some classic *Street Fighter II* artwork taking residence on the front cover, justified by coverage of *Hyper Street Fighter II: Anniversary Edition.*

ISSUE 16

A bold and British Sex Pistols-inspired front cover is the order of the month, as we explore the state of the UK development scene in an in-depth feature.

ISSUE 17

Second Sight makes it onto the cover for issue 17 as we carry an exclusive preview of Free Radical's two-year secret project.

Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat
	**12 January** Sammy kick-starts its year by spending all its Christmas money on £243 million worth of Sega shares. We buy chocolate.			**18 January** First details and sleek renders of what would eventually become the amusingly named Gizmondo become available. We look on in pity and wonder.		 
01 February First details of Nintendo's new dual-screened wonder are unveiled and we mock up a 'brave' impression of what the final hardware will look like.			**05 February** The beginning of the end is marked for Acclaim as news reaches us that EA has snagged publishing rights to the upcoming *Burnout 3*.		      	**07 February** Visit sunny Birmingham and say hello to Swordfish Studios 
	18 February Although modding is illegal in the UK, Italian courts rule that PS2 mod chips should not be banned, with the judges saying that it's up to owners to use the console "as they see fit".			**01 March** Another step towards videogames gaining the recognition they deserve comes as the first videogame BAFTA awards take place. Predictably, Rockstar's *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* is the biggest success of the evening, walking away with six gongs, including the awards for Best Action Title, Best Sound, Best Design, Best PlayStation2 Title and Best PC Title. Proof, if it were needed, that crime does pay…		
05 March *"Put simply, Pandora Tomorrow's multiplayer takes your breath away and is the most exciting prospect for Xbox Live this year"* SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW Issue 17 **Final Verdict 9/10**		**17 March** Retrieve Master System from Mum's attic for retro feature		**22 March** As expected, we receive news that the N-Gage has failed to sell anywhere near as many units as intended, titling our news story 'Told You So'. Quite.	 	
				***Quote of the Quarter*** *"We are still sceptical about online gaming and have not yet seen any evidence in the current generation of consoles that it makes viable business sense"* *Shelly Pearce, Head of PR, Nintendo Europe*		 

You never know quite what to expect from the first few months of a videogaming year. Theoretically, all the decent games should have come out before Christmas, leaving a big steaming compost heap of below-par games for the beginning of the new year. And at first, this is what happened – our January issue saw us struggling to fight off such voucher-fodder horrors as *Rogue Ops, Chicago 1930* and *Sonic Battle* plus many more gaming nightmares we'd rather just forget. All we could do was look forward to the quality releases on the horizon, such as *The Sims 2, Dead Or Alive Ultimate* and *Ninja Gaiden*. Luckily, March brought with it some quality review titles, with such classics as *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow, Far Cry* and *Metroid: Zero Mission* demanding attention.

"You never know what to expect at the start of the gaming year"



April / May / June

THE GAMES COME THICK AND FAST IN THE SECOND QUARTER, BUT WHERE ARE THOSE KILLER APPS?

ISSUE 18

Details of Microsoft's Xbox 2 XNA developer tools emerge from the Game Developers' Conference, leaving developers and publishers to ponder the possibilities.

ISSUE 19

New details and screenshots of *Doom 3*, plus a retrospective look at the *Doom* series (one of the most important franchises ever), make issue 19 the '*Doom* issue'.

ISSUE 20

News about the sequel to last year's best game, plus an interview with the *Prince Of Persia* executive producer, gets *Prince Of Persia 2* on the cover.

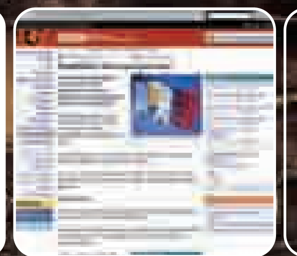
Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat

01 April
Speculation is rife about the Nintendo DS as news comes in suggesting one of the screens will be touch sensitive, allowing gamers to control on-screen action with a stylus. An April fool, surely?



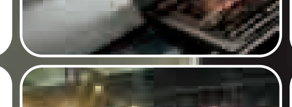


07 April
As talk of the new generation of consoles gets underway, a news story containing a tedious and pointless collection of stats appears on the BBC's website. The findings of various surveys puts Sony at the head of the market, Microsoft second and Nintendo third… Nice one, lads.



23 April
Not perturbed by the less-than-spectacular performance of the N-Gage, Nokia reveals plans for a sleeker, more useable version of the machine, yet decides the screen dimensions are fine as they are.





06 May
A documentary aired on BBC Three taking a hard-nosed look at Nintendo ruffles the industry's feathers by choosing to (surprise) sensationalise and misreport a number of key issues, including the matter of videogames and epilepsy – an issue Nintendo has been dealing with for years. Naturally, Nintendo isn't happy, blasting the documentary in a lengthy press release.

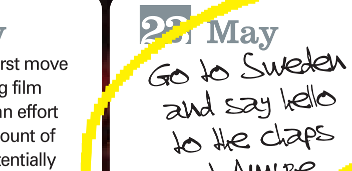


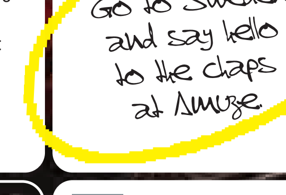
10 May
Distribution company 20:20 games manages to anger Sony by importing European consoles and selling them on at cheaper-than-Sony prices to independent stores across the country.

12 May
Sony and Nintendo both uncover their handheld wonders – the PSP and DS – to the world, with Nintendo's Reggie Fils-Aime unleashing his now-famous quote (see below), saying: "We understand the handheld market better than anyone else, and Nintendo paves a new path of originality and success." Sony, on the other hand, frustrates people by limiting what it shows them.

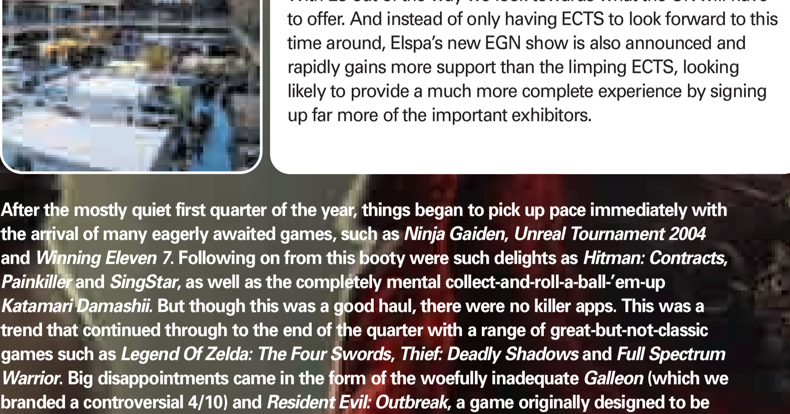
16 May
Sony makes its first move towards acquiring film studio MGM, in an effort to bolster the amount of movies it can potentially release on UMD format for its upcoming PSP.

22 May





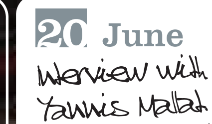
Go to Sweden and say hello to the chaps at Amuze



05 June
With E3 out of the way we look towards what the UK will have to offer. And instead of only having ECTS to look forward to this time around, Elspa's new EGN show is also announced and rapidly gains more support than the limping ECTS, looking likely to provide a much more complete experience by signing up far more of the important exhibitors.

07 June
EA finally announces that its next wave of titles will feature Xbox Live support. We imagine playing *Burnout 3* online, our hearts warm with a kind of gooey joy-joy feeling of happiness.

20 June



Interview with Yannis Mallat. Ask him about rearing farm animals.

After the mostly quiet first quarter of the year, things began to pick up pace immediately with the arrival of many eagerly awaited games, such as *Ninja Gaiden, Unreal Tournament 2004* and *Winning Eleven 7*. Following on from this booty were such delights as *Hitman: Contracts, Painkiller* and *SingStar*, as well as the completely mental collect-and-roll-a-ball-'em-up *Katamari Damashii*. But though this was a good haul, there were no killer apps. This was a trend that continued through to the end of the quarter with a range of great-but-not-classic games such as *Legend Of Zelda: The Four Swords, Thief: Deadly Shadows* and *Full Spectrum Warrior*. Big disappointments came in the form of the woefully inadequate *Galleon* (which we branded a controversial 4/10) and *Resident Evil: Outbreak*, a game originally designed to be online but rendered single-player (and thus useless) here in the UK.

Quote of the Quarter

"My name is Reggie. I'm about kicking ass, I'm about taking names, and we're about making games"

Reggie Fils-Aime, Head of Sales and Marketing, Nintendo



"After the quiet first quarter, things start to pick up"

July / August / September

TRADITIONALLY THE DRY SEASON FOR GAMES, SUMMER 2004 SEES A FEW GOOD RELEASES… AND AN UTTERLY AMAZING ONE



ISSUE 21

The eye-bleedingly fast *Burnout 3* makes the front and back covers this month. Inside is a four-page preview of the game and an interview with Criterion's Alex Ward.

ISSUE 22

We receive advance information and screens for *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory*, constructing a four-page first look at the game and the games™ 'stealth' front cover.

ISSUE 23

A trip to Seattle for a playtest of *Halo 2* leads to a minimalist *Halo 2* cover, representing a bumper preview of the game inside the magazine.

Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat

05 July
The issue of piracy is raised as a survey conducted across gaming websites by copy protection experts Macrovision reveals that 33 per cent of gamers have downloaded copied games.



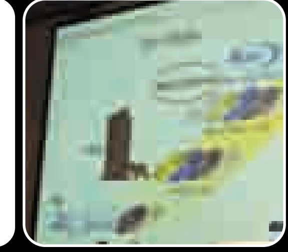
17 July
Infinium Labs says that it plans to release its much-mocked Phantom console in Europe during 2005 with a US release planned for the end of the year. We decide against holding our breath.



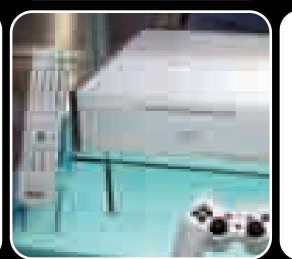
18 July
Visit Ste and John Pickford. Bring cake.



27 July
It's revealed that the PlayStation3's unveiling will take place at the end of the year, according to a timeline of events shown at Sony's PlayStation Meeting 2004 in Tokyo.



03 August
Sony announces its hybrid PSX unit will not ship in the US and Europe in 2004 as planned, instead announcing a release sometime in 2005.



08 August
Microsoft announces it's broken the magical one million users barrier with its Xbox Live service, claiming that 220 million online play sessions have been logged.



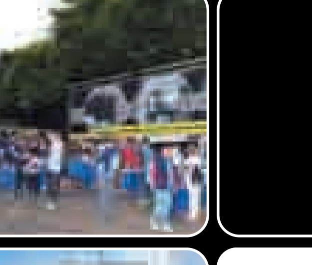
19 August
Interview Dave Perry (No, not that one).

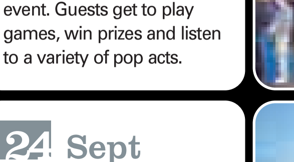
22 August
Vivendi Universal lays off 350 workers as part of its 'restructuring plans'. Plans that also involved splitting the company three ways into separate divisions.

30 August
Manhunt finds itself at the centre of media baboonery as 14-year-old Stefan Pakeerah is murdered by an older friend – a friend who also owns *Manhunt*. Or so it seemed. Further investigation reveals the game was actually found in the bedroom of the victim, a fact irresponsibly ignored by the newspapers. As the story grows, newspapers decide to launch a short-lived campaign against violent games.

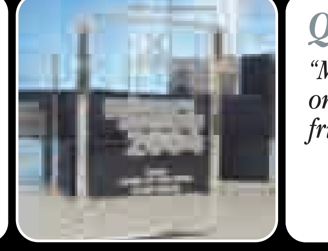
11 Sept
"Burnout 3 is without a doubt the greatest racing game the world has ever seen. Nothing else with four wheels can match its pace, ferocity and skill"
BURNOUT 3: TAKEDOWN Issue 23
Final Verdict 10/10

16 Sept
Sony's PlayStation experience ditches trade show ECTS and goes to Alton Towers for its 2004 event. Guests get to play games, win prizes and listen to a variety of pop acts.



24 Sept
The second annual **games™** awards ceremony takes place. Everyone dances, drinks and has a merry old time, while Ubisoft, which receives six awards, is the star of the show.



Quote of the Quarter
"Murder by PlayStation: Horror images on computer drove teenager to kill his friend aged 14"
Daily Mail front page

And so we come to the summer, a time when people are too busy enjoying barbeques and beaches to be sitting around in their pants at home playing games – hence the frequent lack of decent software in this period. Only one big-name release graced 2004's ice cream season and in turn became the biggest videogame joke of the year. Yes, we're referring to *Driv3r* and its massively unfinished on-sale state. Things remained quiet for a short while as we set our minds to looking forward to such future big hitters as *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* and *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory*. But then it happened: *Burnout 3* arrived and changed our lives forever – we had a new purpose in life, we learned to love again. *Doom 3* and *Tales Of Symphonia* also turned up, marking the end of the summer drought.

"Burnout 3 changes our lives forever. We learn to love again"

October / November / December

AS CHRISTMAS ROLLS AROUND, THE BIG GUNS GET WHEELED OUT IN THE SALES WAR



ISSUE 24

We fly to New York to get a look at *GTA: San Andreas* and proceed to go *GTA* crazy with previews of the PS2 and GBA games and a feature on the rise of the *GTA* franchise.

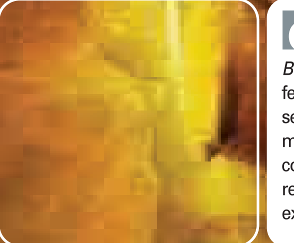
ISSUE 25

An exclusive review of *The Legend Of Zelda: The Minish Cap* prompts one of the nicest covers in the history of the mag. We also interview Eiji Aonuma of Nintendo Japan.

ISSUE 26

December sees the Cube's biggest game of the year, *Metroid Prime: Echoes,* getting a four-page review explaining why it's an essential purchase.

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat



01 October
Burnout 3 backlash reaches fever pitch as EA's Xbox Live servers under-perform by making it hard to remain connected to lobbies. Problems remain (albeit to a lesser extent) at the end of the year.

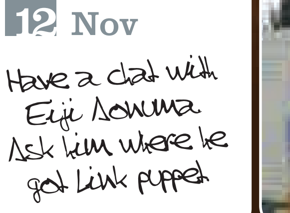


03 October
Reports by market research company Screen Digest reveal that the UK games market has grown by a staggering 100 per cent in just six years, while music sales fell 4.5 per cent in the same period.

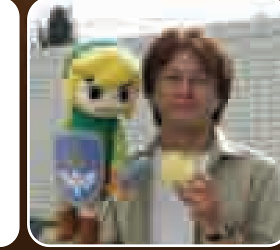
09 October
The Acclaim castle begins to crumble into dust as the company is forced to file for bankruptcy due to mounting debts and poor sales. Perhaps if it hadn't let *Burnout 3* go, eh?

29 October
Sony releases a slimmer and sleeker version of its PS2 hardware, dubbed PStwo. The launch coincides with the release of guaranteed seller *GTA: San Andreas* as a kind of double-team sales effort.

07 Nov
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas becomes the fastest selling game ever in the UK, managing to shift around 677,000 copies in its first weekend before going on to sell a million in just nine days. With too few copies to go around, some people who pre-ordered the game were left disappointed, highlighting problems with stock allocation and pre-order methods.



12 Nov
Have a chat with Eiji Aonuma. Ask him where he got Link puppet





14 Nov
Not content to let *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* have all the glory, *Halo 2* smashes US sales records, grossing more in 24 hours than any other game – or film – has ever managed. According to Microsoft's Peter Moore, the release of the hugely anticipated sequel is "a seminal milestone for the entire industry".

01 Dec
"A sequel that's good enough to convert even those gamers who didn't enjoy the original title. We doubt anyone could have asked for anything more."

HALO 2 Issue 26
Final Verdict 9/10

03 Dec
Sony America sends out demo discs to all its PlayStation Underground members, unaware that the disc completely erases users' memory cards. Fans are not amused.



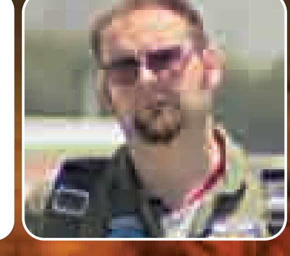


05 Dec
Citing a storyline that goes "way too far" and clearly not keen to annoy its neighbour, South Korea bans *Ghost Recon 2* over its portrayal of North Korea. The game prompted one North Korean newspaper to write,"This may be just a game to them now, but a war will not be a game for them later. In war, they will only face miserable defeat and gruesome deaths." Glad we got that sorted, then…

With summer coming to a close our eyes turned towards the annual shopping nightmare that is Christmas and all the videogame goodness that accompanies it. Kicking off the festive countdown were beauties like *Fable, Star Wars Battlefront* and *The Sims 2*. Then a quiet patch. Amazingly, all the publishers with big games to promote decided to hold them back at review stage, choosing to show them to other magazines that haven't got our reputation for being completely honest about things. Still, at least we had *Rome: Total War* and *Zelda: The Minish Cap* to keep us going. And then it happened, the games we'd waited all year for were finally here. *Halo 2* and *GTA: San Andreas* were as awesome as expected, while *The Getaway: Black Monday* and *Killzone* failed to justify their hype.

Quote of the Quarter
"This show isn't for humourless geeks who get a stiffy over screenshots of Halo 2"

Dominik Diamond, Presenter, When Games Attack



"All eyes turn towards the shopping nightmare that is Christmas"



Year Planner 2005

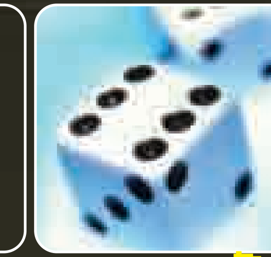
LOOKING AHEAD TO SEE WHAT THE NEXT 12 MONTHS HAVE IN STORE FOR GAMERS

Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat

01 January
Remember, vouchers are your friends. After the hangover of too much Christmas cheer has faded, take all the vouchers into town and exchange them for all those games no-one bothered to buy you. Remember, though – some games have slipped, so keep a few back for those. Put any actual hard cash you received into your PSP and DS fund. You'll thank yourself.



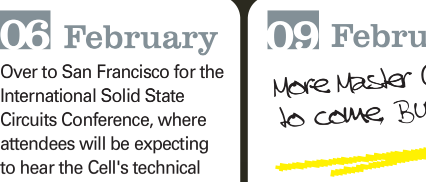
06 January
Las Vegas' Consumer Electronics Show rolls around once more, with all eyes on Microsoft – or, more specifically, Bill Gates – as we wait for the follow-up to the Xbox to be unveiled.



25 January
No sooner has the year started and we're off to see all the latest coin-op wonders at the ATEI show in London. Pound coins at the ready…

06 February
Over to San Francisco for the International Solid State Circuits Conference, where attendees will be expecting to hear the Cell's technical details – it's the chip set to power the PS3, you know.

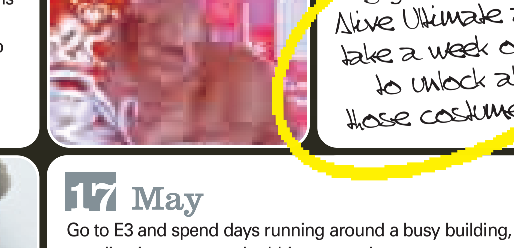
09 February
More Master Chief to come, Bungie?





14 February
Once again orchestrate a large mail-out to all the girls in the industry and in our own office that we want to be special friends with.



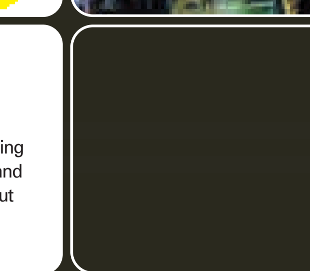


23 March
Buy Dead Or Alive Ultimate and take a week off to unlock all those costumes



31 March
The event of the year is looking to be the release of the PSP and DS handhelds. Which one will you choose? If you listened to us and saved you cash, you can get both. Nintendo's DS has had a head start over Sony's PlayStation Portable, and Nintendo has always dominated the handheld market. But Sony's vast marketing budget and technological know-how may change all that…

17 May
Go to E3 and spend days running around a busy building, standing in queues and rubbing up against sweaty Americans. Oh, and look at all the games too. We'll be hoping to see the likes of *The Legend Of Zelda*, *Perfect Dark Zero* and *Advance Wars DS*, while finding out some firm details about the PlayStation3, Xbox 2 and maybe, just maybe, the Nintendo Revolution…



Notes

Wanda to Kyozou – From the creators of Ico, Wanda To Kyozou is looking like one of the most beautifully crafted games ever created, with its sprawling landscapes and giant enemies. Definitely one to watch.

The Legend Of Zelda – While we fully appreciate the cel-shaded angle taken with Link's last adventure, we do have a hankering for a more gritty and dramatic episode, which 2005's offering looks set to deliver.

Gran Turismo 4 – By now some people probably think this game is a myth, destined to never arrive. It appeared on the calendar feature we did last year in exactly this spot and it's still not spinning in our PS2 drives.

May

M	-	2	9 16	23	30
T	-	3	10 17	24	31
W	-	4	11 18	25	-
T	-	5	12 19	26	-
F	-	6	13 20	27	-
S	-	7	14 21	28	-
S	1	8	15 22	29	-

June

M	-	6	13	20	27	-
T	-	7	14	21	28	-
W	1	8	15	22	29	-
T	2	9	16	23	30	-
F	3	10	17	24	-	-
S	4	11	18	25	-	-
S	5	12	19	26	-	-

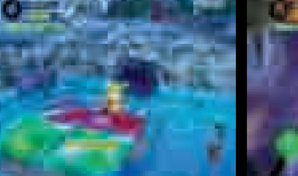
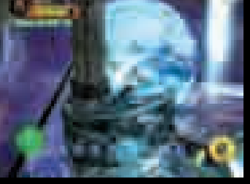
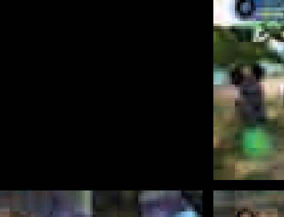
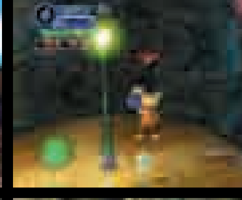
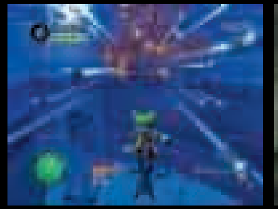
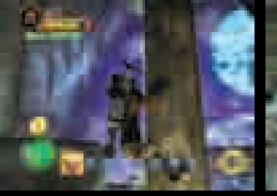
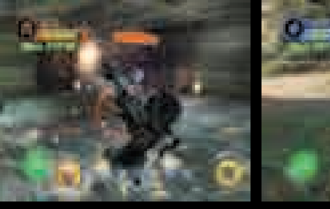
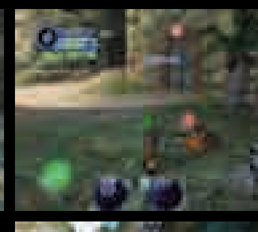
July

M	-	4	11	18	25	
T	-	5	12	19	26	-
W	-	6	13	20	27	-
T	-	7	14	21	28	-
F	1	8	15	22	29	-
S	2	9	16	23	30	-
S	3	10	17	24	31	-

Getting closer to the next generation

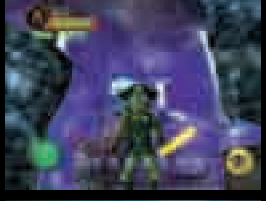
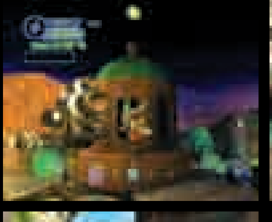
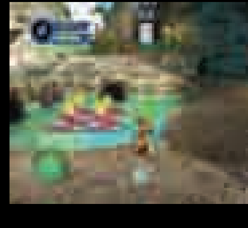
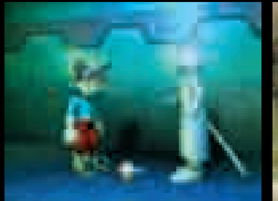
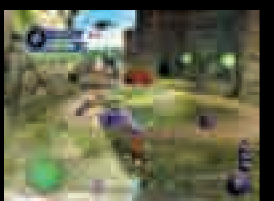
HARDWARE RELEASES AND REVELATIONS KEEP 2005 INTERESTING

You only have to look at our last issue and the massive scores it contained to realise that 2005 has its work cut out to match the quality on offer here. It's safe to assume that *Halo 3* and *Grand Theft Auto: Planet Earth* won't be around for a couple of years at least so we're looking forward to the upcoming battle between Sony's PSP and Nintendo's DS, both of which promise to completely revolutionise handheld gaming. With the PSP's uncanny 3D ability allowing for handheld games to match the gameplay of their in-home counterparts, and the DS's touch screen potentially allowing for all-new types of games altogether, it's safe to assume that handheld gaming is about to become a much bigger part of the overall gaming picture. And that's before we've even mentioned the imminent annoucements from Microsoft, Sony and Nintendo about the next generation of consoles. If 2004 was good for software, 2005 will be great for hardware.

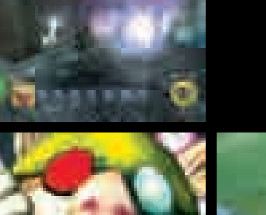
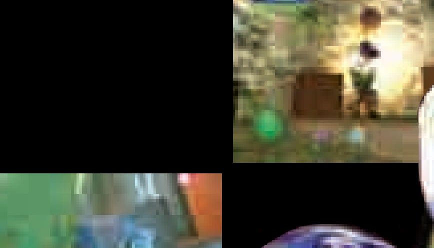
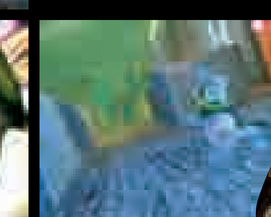


REVIEWS

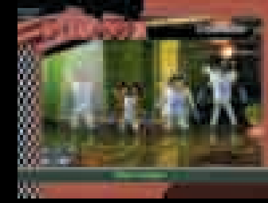
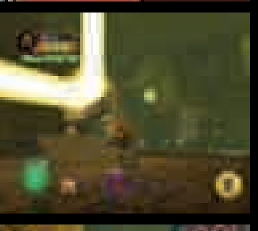
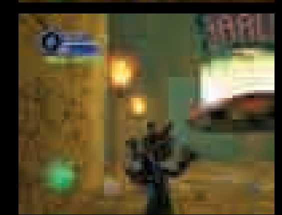
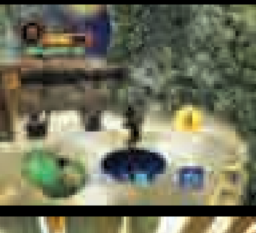
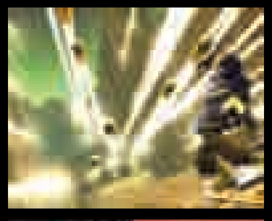
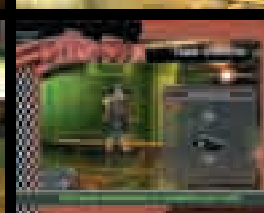
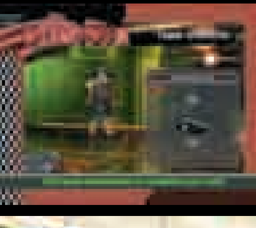
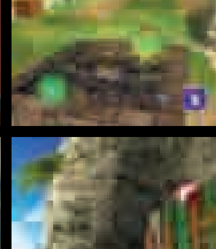
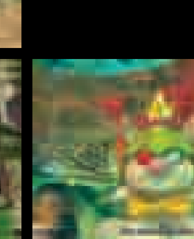
Nobody fights like cats and dogs any more. If you want to rule time and space, you need to start fighting like cats and pigs…

Blinx 2: Masters Of Time And Space 102

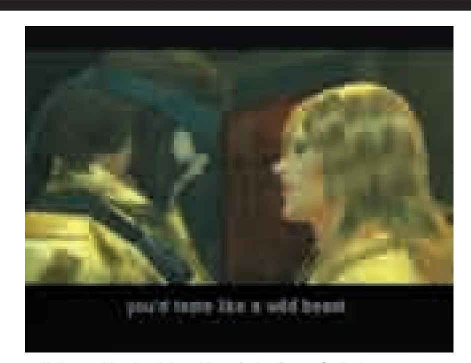






THE AVERAGE

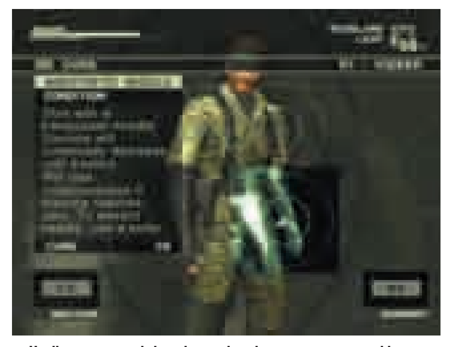
Despite representing an industry in which high scores mean everything, games™ is not a magazine that marks with the majority. A lot of people think that anything below 7 (7.0, 70%, whatever) is a bad score – we don't. Going on a scale of one to ten, five is the average – average being a game that does what it sets out to do without attempting to do it better than anyone else. If a game gets five you'll get some enjoyment out of it but nothing more, simple as that. What's more, we won't be swayed by PR people telling us what a game's like – we only decide once we've played each game to death and, in the majority of cases, to completion. If a game's bad we'll make sure you know, if it's great we'll sing its praises. At the end of the day, we're just here to help you decide what's worth your hard-earned cash. After all, if it wasn't for you, we'd be out of a job.





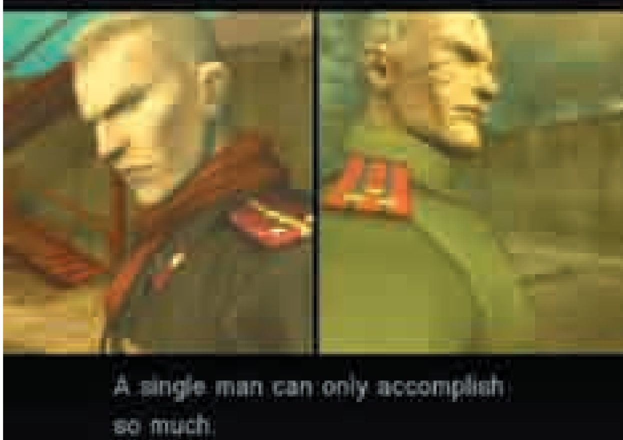
Kojima tackles the tricky subject of what flavour Snake is.



Healing your wounds is an interesting element – we can see this being imitated quite a lot.



Firing off hundreds of rounds from a mounted gun might not be too sneaky but it sure is a lot of fun.







Once you've mastered the CQC (Close-Quarter Combat) moves you're able to decimate entire armies. If you want.

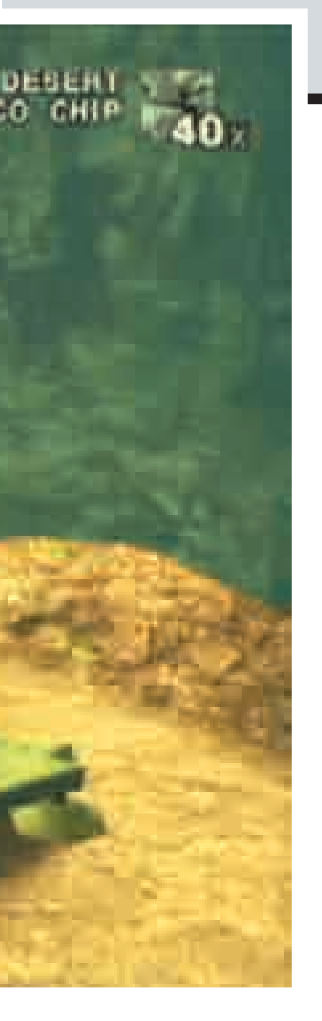
games™

ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

HARDCORE: No radar, more guards – the toughest *Metal Gear Solid* yet.

CQC: Snake's close combat skills can make trouncing guards a cinch.



METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SNAKE EATER

"YOU'RE IN THE JUNGLE, BABY – YOU'RE GONNA DIE"

We are entering a very strange time in gaming. As we expectantly sit on the eve of a new generation of hardware, who would have thought we'd be seeing games match, let alone exceed, the production values and revenue of music and cinema? Indeed, who would have believed they'd ever hear anything so patently ridiculous as Square Enix's Tetsuya Nomura branding *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children* the debut of "non-interactive software"? According to some people, however, non-interactive software has been rolling off the Konami production line for some time…

While the first *Metal Gear Solid* was a larger-than-life affair and the second took a few more liberties (no pun intended) with its narrative, parts of *Snake Eater* seem as though Hideo Kojima has grabbed the Silly Bull by the horns. For ages, it's hard to work out exactly what the super-powered travelling freak show has to do with Snake's politically grounded mission but we'll only say that the story is far more intelligible and well-worked than that of *Sons Of Liberty*. The juxtaposition of realism and fiction is probably the game's single biggest mistake – on their own, the time-consuming realistic elements (such as having to hunt for food, carrying a limited amount of items and having to tend to your wounds) are fine. In the presence of, say, a man with ultimate power over hornets, however, less so.

There's no nice way of saying it but the first few hours of *Metal Gear Solid 3* are by far the weakest part of the game. They're far from terrible – the frequent and lengthy cut-scenes are beautifully put together and fairly well written in places – but until the FMV intro has been and gone (a good two or three hours in), *Snake Eater* struggles to feel coherent. Come the halfway point you'll be thankful for the deluge of back story and semi-useful information that was thrown at you, but there's always a nagging sensation that it could have been handled in a more palatable way.

Bombarding you with cut-scenes may be seen as 'classic *Metal Gear*' but there's innovation here too. Removing the radar is a brave move by Konami, but after the initial shock of not having a direct link to every guard's eyes so you know where to hide, it gives the series a much-needed shake-up. Rather than rushing into an area and stopping just before an enemy's line of sight, you'll be holding back and relying on binoculars and limited-use motion sensors before making your move. As you'd expect, this really slows the pace of the game (especially given the fixed camera, which can be shunted around a little), but when you reach later areas you'll understand why Konami wanted you to have all your stealth skills about you.

In taking away the device that served as many people's lifeline, and by making enemies more

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2 (US)

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Konami

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
$49.99

RELEASE
March (US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SONS OF LIBERTY



BETTER THAN

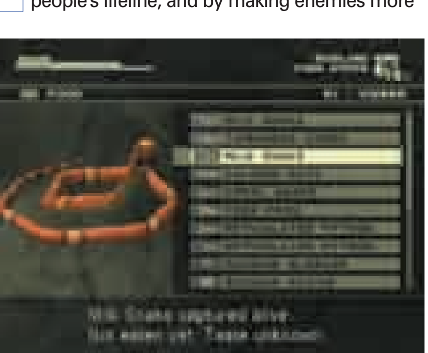
JUST LIKE



METAL GEAR SOLID



Being a super-awesome special agent, Snake can only climb trees coated in bright green vines. Obviously.



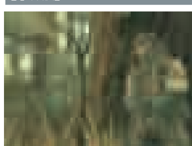
Our milk snake brings all the boys to the yard… Discover lots of interesting fauna, then fry it up with a few berries.



24:00 TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS

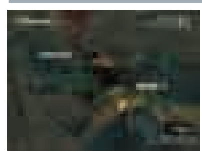
THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM

30 mins



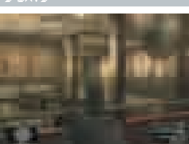
The watch-to-play ratio is, at this point, disturbingly high. You'll be wondering why Konami thought it wise to slow the game down, and wishing you could pick up the pad again.

3 HOURS



It's getting better, though you might be about to enter the 45-minute-put-the-pad-down-and-watch session. It's great but grab a drink before you go back across that bridge…

3 DAYS



Nearing the end now and it all starts to make sense. The pacing finally feels right and you're beginning to realise that after a slightly shaky start, *MGS3* is rather good. Phew.



SHOW ME THE MONKEY

If you should ever tire of sneaking through the jungle and cutting people to ribbons with your overpowered CQC attacks, how about a little light relief? Snake Vs Monkey is by far one of the classiest mini-games we've seen in a long time, requiring Snake to take his Monkey Shaker gun and capture the stars of *Ape Escape*. This is every bit as enjoyable as we could ever have hoped, and from the cowardly apes hiding in the trees to the Liquid imitator atop a giant mechanical monkey you really do have to catch 'em all. But trust Konami to cut-scene the hell out of even a light-hearted bonus game – the intro is a wonderfully referential radio conversation that is probably one of the strongest in the game. Lovely.

"AMONG THE CRINGE-WORTHY REFERENTIAL HUMOUR AND ELONGATED CUT-SCENES LIES A MASTERPIECE TRYING TO BREAK OUT"

alert and more numerous, Snake's latest mission (or earliest, depending on whether you mean real-world or narrative chronology) is undoubtedly his toughest yet. You need to rely on keeping yourself hidden and God help you if you accidentally wander into a jungle camp while wearing your brick camo. Boss battles often seem tricky but a few radio calls can get all the advice you need. (The thought of Snake taking a time out to make a radio call while Ocelot waits impatiently still amuses us.) Thankfully, Konami hasn't been too brutal and there's plenty of added items and abilities to keep Snake alive that little bit longer.

Top of the list of helpful additions is Snake's knack for close-quarter combat, or 'CQC'. What this means is that most one-handed weapons will also enable him to unleash a host of powerful hand-to-hand moves – the chokehold/neck snap that used to be available only from behind is now useable at any time, and with throat slitting, throws, hostage taking and even interrogations all possible there are loads of new ways to tackle seemingly impossible areas. In fact, once you get a feel for the CQC moves you won't even need a gun to get through many areas. While these moves are all available after sneaking up on someone, they come into their own when dealing with Alert situations. Run into a corner and watch the guards run in like lambs to the slaughter until you've snapped or severed every neck in the area.

It's not all about running up to a swarm of goons and slamming them to the ground, though. *Snake Eater* has been pulled just far enough away from its predecessors to feel like a true sequel and it's with the survival aspects that this is most apparent. Camouflage works well on the whole, offering a range of face and body options depending on your situation (with more to be found in the field). The medical side of things is more interesting still, and although cutting out your umpteenth bullet before treating the wound with four different substances can get irritating, it's hard to argue that the system isn't well handled. Then there's the matter of keeping Snake fed – your stamina level falls over time and only by eating local flora and fauna can the bandana-wearing hero stay in top shape.

But the difficult thing to call is just where to draw the line in terms of criticism. Do you slam things like Snake's pitiful climbing ability, the ridiculously lengthy cut-scenes and the old-fashioned nature of many other areas or simply accept them as part of what *Metal Gear Solid* is?





■ *Snake Eater* is hands-down one of the best-looking titles of this generation.

SUPER CROAKER

Wipe that concerned look off your face – this time around you won't need to worry about holding up every guard in the game and taking their dog tags. Instead, you'll find yourself hunting high and low in every corner of the jungle for model frogs. Shooting these sets them ribbitting like there's no tomorrow and if you can track down enough of them you're sure to be rewarded at the end of the game. The little green guys are a touch on the small side so they're usually pretty tough to spot, especially in the middle of a heated battle or daring escape. Still, keep your eyes peeled and you might just round up all of the little froggies. If you even want to, of course.

games™ CONNECTED

EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY

HIDE AND SNEAK: In addition to the basic camouflage sets and those you can find scattered about the game, you're even able to download extra suits via the magic of the internet. Thanks, Konami.

Ultimately, this will determine whether you enjoy the game – acceptance of the game world and its slightly dated mechanics is the only way to get the best out of *Snake Eater*. That said, while Fisher's agility makes Snake look decrepit, and while certain recent games handle storytelling better than this, there remains a certain charm and magic about *Snake Eater* that just can't be found in titles without Kojima's Midas touch. It's a game that nobody else would dare make and that works for and against it.

You probably already know if you're going to enjoy *Snake Eater*. If the idea of doing more watching than playing puts you off, you may not get past the first few hours, but the prize comes to those that persevere. Under the cringe-worthy referential humour, elongated periods of inactivity and an occasional air of laurel-resting lies a masterpiece trying to break out. And for the most part, it does – there are few games as atmospheric and empowering as *Snake Eater* at its prime, and despite the stark contrast between realism and fantasy there are times when you can't help but applaud the game's imagination. It may tread a fine line between telling you a story and letting you write your own, but the more you play *Snake Eater* the more you realise why we rarely see games try to tread this risky path. It's not because it doesn't work, it's because it's almost impossible to do well. Bandanas off, then, to Kojima for coming so frustratingly close to perfecting his art.



VERDICT 8/10

BRILLIANCE LACED WITH ANNOYANCES



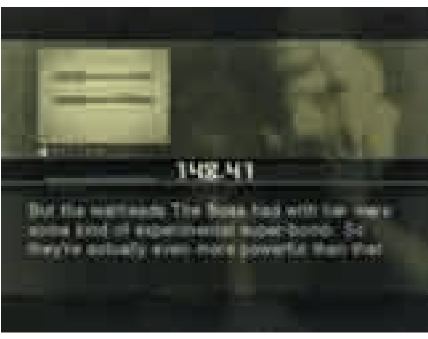
■ Thermal goggles can be extremely useful, highlighting enemies, food and even recent footprints.

FAQs

Q. HOW LONG IS IT?
Probably around 15 to 20 hours on your first play with plenty of extras and replay value.

Q. DO I HAVE TO WATCH THE CUT-SCENES?
They are skippable but for the sake of both plot and direction, we recommend watching them all at least once.

Q. ANY NICE EXTRAS?
Downloadable camo, Snake Vs Monkey, replay bonuses and a whole load of other fun. So yes.



■ Radio conversations can go on a bit – particularly the 'clever' movie references when you save – but what did you expect?



■ Your prize for clearing all five Snake Vs Monkey levels is as useless as it is awesome. Enjoy using it…



VIEWTIFUL JOE 2

HE'S NO VIEWTIFUL STRANGER

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Capcom

DEVELOPER
Clover Studio

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
18 February '05

PLAYERS
1

Remember Fire Leo from the first *Joe* game? This is his brother and he's pretty miffed.

***Viewtiful Joe* was one of those games that took us by surprise.** The unusual visual style grabbed our attention and although the cel-shading perhaps projected the kiddie feel with which the GameCube is often associated, the game was hard as nails, rewarding only the most determined and skilled player with the unlockables and extra modes it had hidden within. Sure, it was tough, but we beat it. So we've been waiting for the sequel in the hope it would provide us with the same challenge and more of the gorgeous looks that sold *Viewtiful Joe* in the first place – and we're in luck.

The story is as ridiculous as before: Captain Blue is a hero again but it's not long before a new, mysterious villain turns him into an Oscar statuette (of course) and kidnaps him. Not best pleased, it's up to Joe and his new sidekick to get him back, retrieve the other six Oscars, say "Henshin a-go-go" a lot and figure out why it's all happening. Yes, Joe has a sidekick – and a damn good looking one at that. After throwing yourself into battle against the nefarious Captain Blue to retain the affections of the lovely Silvia in the first game, the lovely lady now stands by your side and is every bit as dangerous as Joe himself. Wielding lethal pom-poms of death and packing twin laser pistols, Silvia is a welcome heroine and – although noticeably weaker than the man himself – has her own sections of game where only her skills will do.

The most obvious difference between the two is Silvia's Replay ability. Rather than being armed with Joe's famous Mach Speed, Silvia can record certain moves then replay them twice more while enemies just look on helplessly as sections of their robotic bodies are torn off by her elegant legs. A bit of experimentation with this move soon proves that it's actually useless against most bosses and attempts to use the Replay move in these situations often result in being squashed, sliced or burnt three times in succession, thus ending the life of the poor girl. The Replay move is most often called for when having to light three torches at once or hit a button three times to open the way forward; to be honest, it could probably have been used better. The ability to repeat a decent combo or some of Joe's moves would have been a great use of this superb idea – guess we can't have everything.

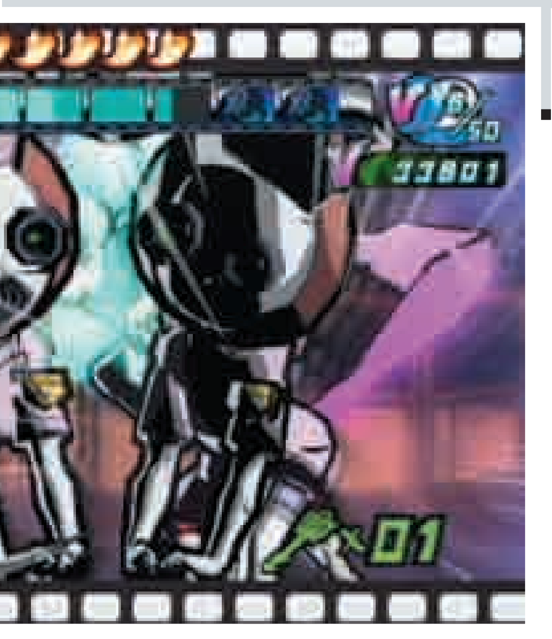
You'll find that switching between the two characters is essential. As tempting as it is to just play as the superior Joe all the time, try to send the lad into the ladies toilet and – just like real life – he'll be ripped apart by miffed females and hurled back onto the street. Silvia, on the other hand, can just wander in and take whatever she wishes unharmed. It's not the trickiest of puzzles, admittedly, and it's a good example of how lightly your brain will be taxed while playing. But then *Viewtiful Joe* isn't about the puzzles and any you





All the moves, all the style. Joe is as cool as ever – and a real hit with the ladies. Must be the skin-tight pink suit.





The Pawns will be donning plenty of new outfits. Look how cute these little nurse Pawns are.



Master Joe's moves and you'll be mangling those Pawns in no time.



do come up against will be solved simply by using one of the four VFX abilities or a certain attack – when it comes down to it, it's all about the fighting.

As with the first game, the combat is amazing. Fluid movements complement the VFX abilities perfectly, and with enough practice you can merge moves and effects together seamlessly to create a brawl that's closer to a ballet of pain rather than the senseless mashing seen in many other games in the genre. It's this factor that brings the game into its own league. Bashing buttons just doesn't work and expert timing and co-ordination are needed to beat many of the enemies. As a foe attacks you'll be given a warning – not a siren or obvious build-up, but a quick flash that tells you that you have approximately no time to perform the correct dodge to avoid the strike. The bosses are the same, and it's almost a certainty that the first time you encounter one of the level guardians you'll be ground to dust by its unpredictable yet astonishingly powerful moves. The only way to be victorious is to learn the patterns, figure out where its weak spot is and exploit it while its guard is down – a process that takes time, patience and a truckload of skill.

Capcom has provided a sequel that surpasses its predecessor in every way. There are few games that are as stylish and playable, and this is tough enough to challenge even the most dextrous gamer. In short – Viewtiful.



VERDICT 8/10
NOT YOUR AVERAGE JOE

games™ ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

GIRL POWER: With Silvia by Joe's side, there are two ways to maul those pesky Pawns.

HARD STUFF: Even tougher than the last game. Don't worry, you can always play on Kids mode.

WHEELS OF STEEL

What's a hero without a decent ride to get him from place to place in style? Joe's Six Machine provided an entertaining shoot-'em-up section in the first *Joe* outing when it transformed into a plane and then later changed into a giant robot in order to take on a planet-sized boss. These levels provided a break from the constant robot-pummelling, so it's nice to see that there's plenty more transforming action this time around. Joe's 'wheels' can now turn into an attack sub or – when Silvia's in the driving seat – a drilling mole machine. Be warned, though – these sections are extremely difficult and you'll need to bring all your skills if you want to make it through them.



Learning the routines of the bosses is going to take a lot of time. Expect to get beaten, toasted, pummelled and mashed a lot.

FAQs

Q. HOW BIG IS IT?
There aren't a huge number of levels, but getting through them is going to take you a fair while.

Q. WHAT ABOUT REPLAYABILITY?
You'll find all the usual unlockables tucked away. You'll have to get through the game first, though.

Q. WHAT ABOUT NEW ENEMIES?
Over 40 new Pawns will be available for you to kick to bits.

ADVANCE GUARDIAN HEROES



BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS



VIEWTIFUL JOE

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Ubisoft

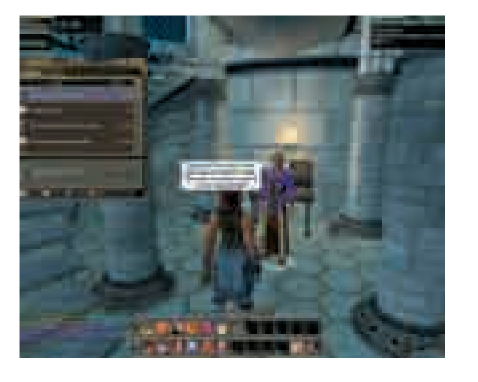
DEVELOPER
Sony Online Entertainment

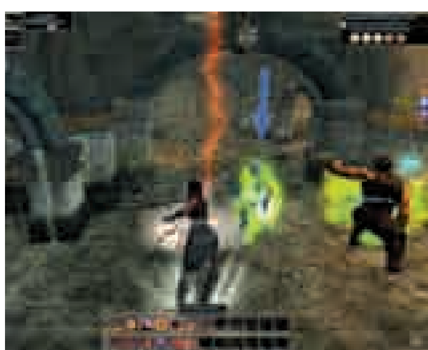
PRICE
£29.99 (plus $14.99 a month subscription)

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
Massively Multiplayer

MINIMUM SPEC
Pentium III 1Ghz processor, 512Mb RAM, 6Gb hard disk space, 64Mb DirectX 9-compatible graphics card, 56k internet connection





Everyone in Norrath has their own opinion and will be happy to express it…

EVERQUEST II

THE MMORPG WORLD OF TOMORROW, TODAY

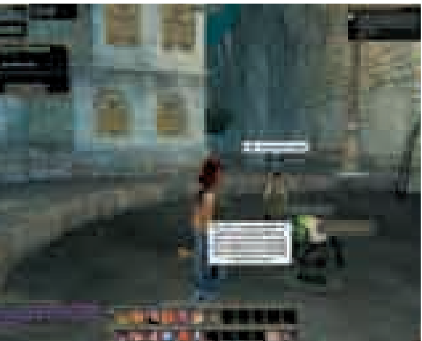
Don't let it be said that Sony Online Entertainment isn't prepared. Back in 1999, SOE released *EverQuest* with the humble goal of giving a few PC gamers their own little universe and ended up being caught off guard by how many people wanted in. Not this time, though. In fact, we'd almost suggest that *EverQuest II* is an example of being a little too prepared for the future; the gaming equivalent of someone who hoards tinned food in an underground bunker. You know, just in case.

So, *EverQuest II* is definitely here for the long haul – something that becomes apparent from the moment you step off Captain Varlos' ship, the Far Journey, onto virtual dry land. By design, you'd expect any MMORPG to offer you a wealth of layers to delve through during the days, weeks and months that you exist within it; even by these standards, though, *EverQuest II*'s scope is almost beyond compare. SOE has reclaimed much of what has recently come to be expected of the genre as its own, expanding each one in ways that both supplement and improve on what inhabitants of Norrath have become accustomed to.

Of course, with *EverQuest II* effectively destroying the land of the original game, leaving everyone – from wide-eyed newcomer to

You can't understand all races at first. Learn a language to expand your contacts.





FAQs

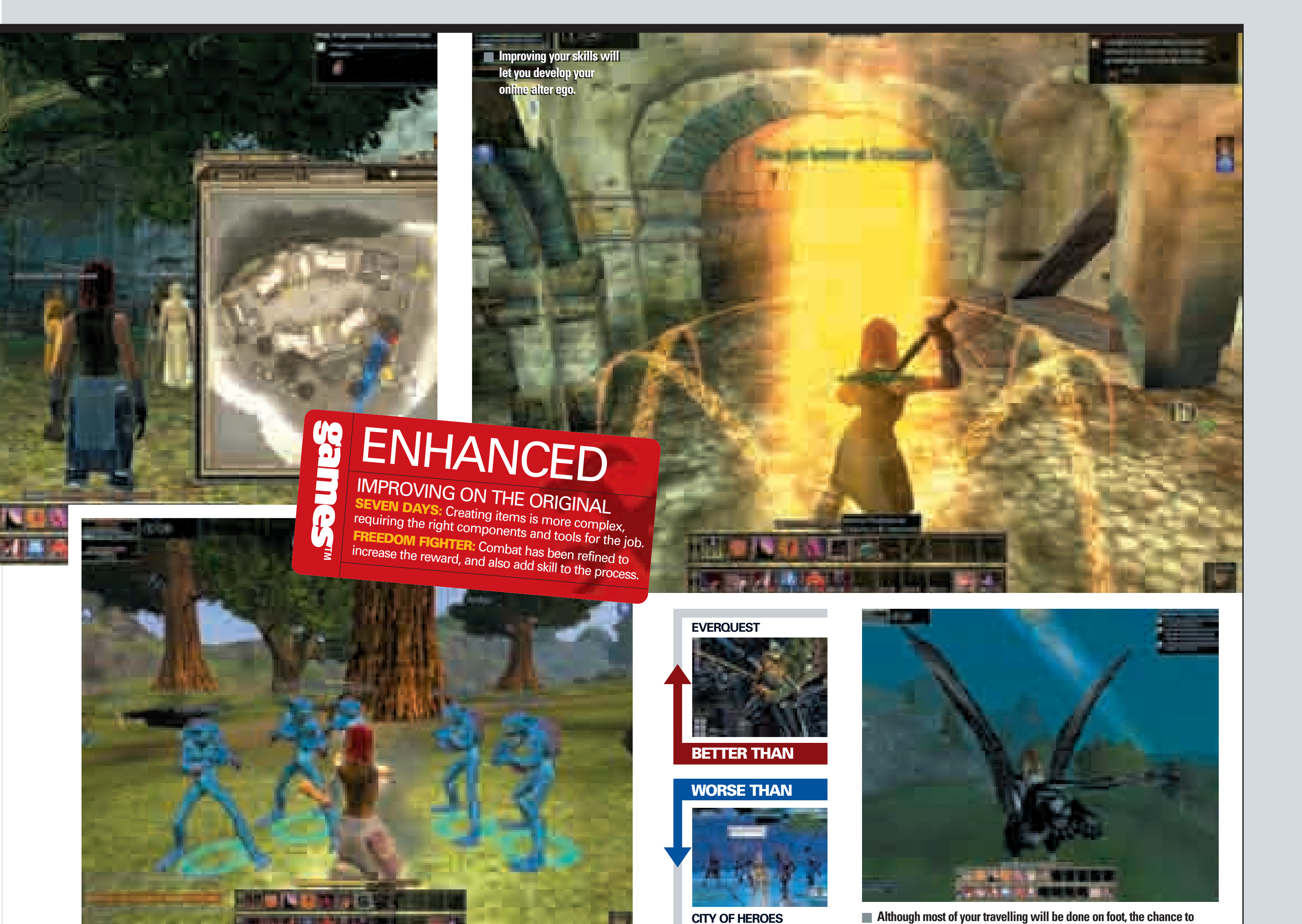
Q. WHERE TO BEGIN?
After the necessary quests at the beginning, everything else you do is entirely up to you.

Q. IMPROVEMENTS?
Combat has been balanced, as well as having skill-based elements added. The artisan aspect of the game is now big enough to be a separate adventure.

Q. THE BAD SIDE?
Inexperienced MMORPG players may feel lost in this huge world when the game stops helping them.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST (OF A PC)

Less important to the gameplay but more critical to the game's continuing ability to impress are the different levels of graphical detail SOE has integrated into the game. Apart from those with the most powerful PCs around, most players will have to settle for the game's High Performance setting to keep things running smoothly; while still very beautiful, the fact that there are four settings above it demonstrates how *EverQuest II* is already well prepared for the future of graphics technology. Of course, the more curious among you can crank it up and see the huge increase in detail awaiting you (lifelike plants, even better water effects, improved texturing and the like) although it hardly makes for a sustainable frame rate.



Improving your skills will let you develop your online alter ego.

Although most of your travelling will be done on foot, the chance to cover great distances by other means is most welcome.

grizzled veteran – to start afresh, SOE's determination to create an entirely new game really shines through. Again, much of it comes down to the way that every aspect of the game has almost bottomless depth, on top of all the refinements that create much-needed balance. Combat, for example, is now far more involving thanks to the *City Of Heroes*-style ability buttons that require well-timed clicking to activate your hero's special skills, while the fact that battles now lock out anyone other than those involved (while fighting alone or as a group) negates the possibility of underhand players stealing much-needed experience points.

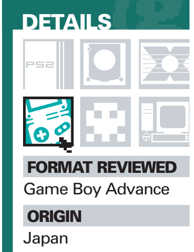
More significantly, the option to learn the skills of item creation is vastly different, almost to the point of being an entirely new adventure in itself. Creating objects to be traded takes far more effort than just clicking on the right things together, as you'll have to acquire specific items and recipes, as well as find the necessary tools. As such, the choice to move up through the artisan ranks lies as a contrast to the combat-heavy questing and gives players yet another way to play the game; setting up shop to provide others with the services they need will no doubt prove appealing to legions of gamers.

Unfortunately, *EverQuest II*'s expansion of the genre also plays a part in its failure to break down the intimidating barriers of the MMORPG genre. Certainly, the game initially appears welcoming to all who would try their hand at being an adventurer, offering a training 'island' that teaches the basics of combat, questing and crafting before sending you into the world. However, once you reach your destination (the villainous city of Freeport or the sanctuary of Qeynos, depending on your character's moral standing) the game stops holding your hand; reasonable for those used to *EverQuest*'s complex system of trading, guilds and questing, but incredibly intimidating for anyone else. Just finding your way around your starting city is daunting enough (mainly because the game offers very little help when it comes to where quest goals lie), but having to then grapple with the complexities of artisan abilities without any pointers, bar what you can glean from the patience of other players, only adds to the feeling of being lost and alone in a completely alien world.

But maybe that's the point. MMORPGs are meant to engulf you in a world you've never explored, forcing you to join like-minded souls and discover your own means of survival, so in that respect *EverQuest II* surpasses every expectation. While the experience is one whose rewards are plentiful, newcomers to the genre should prepare for a baptism of fire if they visit Norrath. The journey may be hugely enjoyable, but you may get hopelessly lost along the way.

VERDICT 8/10
UBISOFT RECLAIMS THE CROWN IN NORRATH'S NAME

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Game Boy Advance
ORIGIN
Japan
PUBLISHER
Ignition
DEVELOPER
SNK
PRICE
£29.99
RELEASE
Out Now
PLAYERS
1

LIMB BY LIMB AND TOOTH BY TOOTH, IN METAL SLUG YOU'LL WISH YOU'RE BULLET PROOF

METAL SLUG ADVANCE

In Belfast, at the back of the Castlecourt shopping centre, there used to be an arcade. Among the games in there was *Metal Slug*, in a cabinet so old that it still took old ten pence pieces and some vandal had burned away at the joystick with a fag. In any case, though, it was one of the quickest ways to waste ten pence. Insert coin, go right… bang! You're dead. *Metal Slug*'s difficulty was petrifying. You either had a big bag of change or you shied away from the machine, justifying your fear with the limp excuse of it costing too much to master. Eight years on, and what was once housed in a cabinet now fits in your palm. Of course, this isn't the original arcade game squeezed onto a GBA cartridge – but it's still the same damn difficult *Metal Slug*.

You know the drill – guide your character left to right, bottom to top, shooting soldiers and rescuing prisoners of war. The POWs leave you essential power-ups for your guns, as well as collectable cards that can alter aspects of the gameplay or characters. Despite this help though, it is really, really difficult. Sub-bosses and bosses appear at regular intervals throughout the levels making staying alive much more stressful, although the inclusion of your aptly named Metal Slug tank makes some of the sections slightly less demanding. There are five missions in total, as well as the nasty Dungeon Mazes; add those together and multiply by 'bloody difficult' and you've got an oldish-school side-scrolling blaster (or memory game, if you want to get really pedantic about it).

What is different with this release is that you have an energy bar rather than lives – take enough hits and you can restart at the last screen rather than restarting the whole game, which is far more lenient than the original Neo-Geo games. Presentation-wise though, the GBA does a great job of keeping up with the arcade version. Graphically it impresses, with tons of sprites and gunfire lighting up the screen (a bonus for non-SP owners) although the sound can be a little squelchy.

Even so, this GBA version proves that *Metal Slug* can still hold its head high (before ducking and covering) in the pantheon of side-scrolling shooters. And that arcade in Belfast? It was demolished and replaced by a sex shop. There's progress for you.



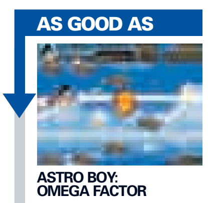
VERDICT 7/10
TOUGH BUT IMMENSELY SATISFYING

MEDAL OF HONOR: INFILTRATOR



BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS



ASTRO BOY: OMEGA FACTOR

ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL
LIVE LIFE: The energy bar is a new addition, possibly because GBAs are so easy to throw.
SAVE US: Again there are POWs to save, but now you can save yourself with battery back-up. Handy.



The more powerful weapons, such as the Laser, come in incredibly short supply.



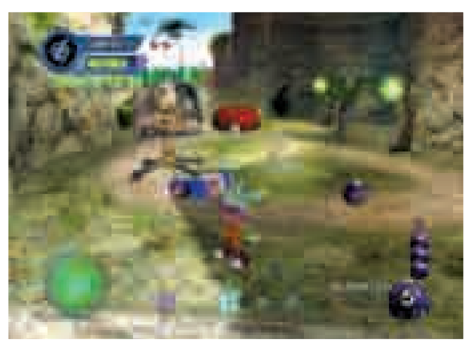
Completists will want to collect all the hidden cards in the game, although keeping them means you'll have to stay alive longer…


eMag



Better Sweepers allow more items and time controls to be carried.

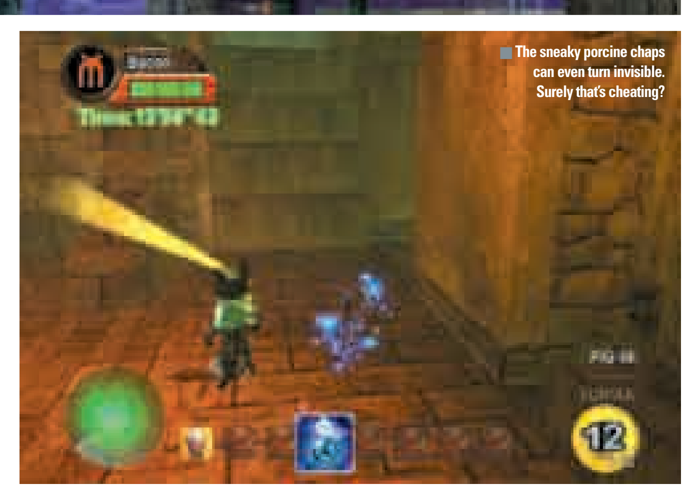




BLINX 2: MASTERS

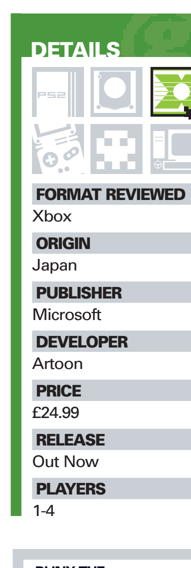
ARTOON'S CAT FINALLY GETS THE CREAM





The sneaky porcine chaps can even turn invisible. Surely that's cheating?

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Microsoft

DEVELOPER
Artoon

PRICE
£24.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-4

BLINX THE TIME SWEEPER

BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



POP: SANDS OF TIME

The word 'mascot' is often thrown around in gaming. Today, only Nintendo can boast a true figurehead, and whether they like it or not, game characters have a tendency to be labelled mascots by a media still living in a world where every console needs an answer to Mario. Of course, there's the unavoidable string of fallen icons – the audacious Bubsy, the vomit-inducing Croc and the just-plain-awful Vexx. But while someone has already been kind enough to engrave a plaque for Blinx, it looks as though this cat might still have a few lives left.

It's tricky not to go into a review of a self-proclaimed 5D game with a little scepticism but no sooner has the intro started than you realise that perhaps such claims were only ever made in jest. The whole experience is one that at no point takes itself seriously and the gorgeous cartoon world of the first game returns shinier than ever, complete with similarly insane bouncy tunes. In fact, the overall feel of the game will be instantly familiar to anyone who played the previous game – a strange phenomenon when so much has been altered, not least the fact that the game plays out from two very different points of view.

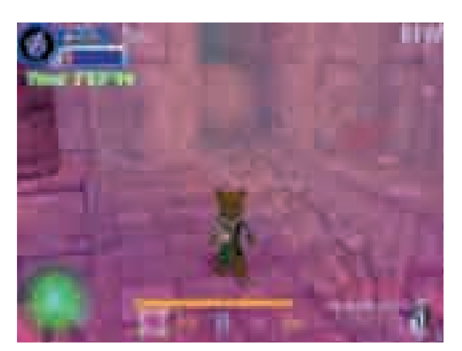
The cat portion of the game is undoubtedly the better of the two, building on the strong foundations and ideas laid down by the first game while fixing some of the problems that plagued *Blinx*. Rewinding time, for instance, is now far more context sensitive than it previously was, allowing broken bridges and such to be repaired based more on positioning than timing – this opens up a whole



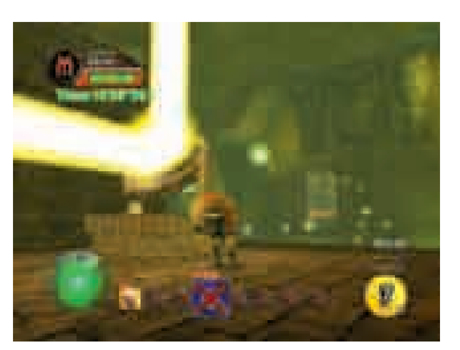
SUITED AND BOOTED

While most of the gaming world is still deciding which of ten or so colours Master Chief should wear, fans of time-sweeping cats have things a whole lot better – in terms of customisation anyway, with some of the most in-depth options for shaping and colouring your avatar that we've yet seen outside of sports games. Sliders determining everything from ear length to hip size allow you to set up both cat and pig just as you want them with an even greater array of outfits becoming available as you make your way through the single-player story. The versus game itself is good for a laugh although it's a real shame that Live support has gone out the window. Regardless, multiplayer is a welcome and fairly well-worked inclusion but it just seems like Artoon realised it would never be able to steal players from the established big guns of Live.

OF TIME AND SPACE



Rewind time and follow the boulder back up the slope. Clever, huh?



Escaping with swag is a slow and laborious process.

new set of possibilities and Artoon has played on these well. Goals and objectives are far more varied than they previously were, and while these tasks are still primarily simplistic affairs they're a lot more rewarding than the 'kill everything then leave' levels of the first game.

When play switches to the pigs, however, you've got a new set of rules and elements to embrace. The trottered ones sneak around in a very *Splinter Cell*-esque manner, but are more light-hearted than Mr Fisher. This works fairly well, breaking up the platform sections and throwing in a few unique gimmicks. Space powers, the pigs' answer to the feline time-bending, are a joy to use and help separate the two sides of the game even more. House favourite is the Subspace Dive, effectively a periscope that allows the user to slip beneath the ground and manoeuvre unnoticed for a short time. The big gripes with this side of the game are with the item procurement and unnecessary shoot-outs – being pirate pigs, the oinkers are fond of swiping swag, unperturbed by the fact that this makes them horribly slow.

Admittedly, the puzzles involved in such carrying are usually fairly well designed but that doesn't make the bewildering lethargy of these sections any more bearable.

Unfortunately, there are still some issues with the game as a whole. Difficulty veers from stupidly hard to revoltingly simple, and the camera, while tweaked, is a little troublesome in places. The switching perspective can also deceive, so just when you're getting the hang of your new time powers you're forced to play as a sneaky piggy again. Or indeed, when you think you're about to switch characters, the game has a nasty habit of throwing extra levels at you. This, coupled with the *Zelda* factor (until substantial progress has been made, each level relies heavily on the powers you just received), means that the feeling of single-player progression is not all it could be. But Artoon has put together a respectable dual-sided adventure, and if you can open your mind just enough to let in a cat with a vacuum cleaner and a rather camp biker pig, you won't fail to enjoy *Blinx 2*.



games™

ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

MOVE IT: Thankfully, Artoon has tightened up the controls significantly since the last game

MORE PIGGIES: Time Sweepers are only half the game; you'll be the Tom Tom gang for the other half.

FAQs

Q. ISN'T THAT JUST A VACUUM CLEANER?
No, don't be silly. It's a Time Sweeper.

Q. HOW DOES A VACUUM CLEANER SWEEP TIME?
It's not a vacuum cleaner. And it's probably magic or something.

Q. WHY IS A CAT CARRYING A VACUUM CLEANER?
Shut up. We're not talking to you any more.

VERDICT 7/10

CROSS-BREEDS CATS AND PIGS WITH GREAT SUCCESS

ALIEN HOMINID

"NOW TO UNLEASH SCREAMING TEMPORAL DOOM…"

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube (US)

OTHER FORMAT
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
O3 Entertainment

DEVELOPER
The Behemoth

PRICE
$29.99

RELEASE
TBA (US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-2

In a market moving closer towards having a few conglomerates ruling all, we'd never have foreseen an unknown developer risking everything to turn its popular Flash web game into a fully fledged multiformat release, let alone having the audacity to make it 2D. But The Behemoth recognises the insuperable odds faced by *Alien Hominid*. "The industry shut the doors on 2D because it no longer had mass-market appeal," its website reads. "We've cried for many years, but now those tears of sadness have turned into determination to revive and evolve our favourite genres." And if that can't be done with as loveable and as wonderful a game as this, perhaps we really are beyond hope.

At its core, *Alien Hominid* is an excellent homage to the tried-and-tested *Metal Slug* formula – old school run-and-gun gameplay can obviously be traced back far further but look beneath the explosion-in-a-Crayola-factory presentation and you'll see how close this really is to SNK's classics. The combination of vehicles, grenades, insane difficulty and massive bosses all help the game feel instantly familiar and playable but it's those areas where The Behemoth has gone above and beyond what is expected that really make *Hominid* something special.

You see, it's not all shoot, shoot, shoot – enemies can be slashed, ridden, thrown or decapitated at close range. Diving underground is a great way to avoid damage and you can even burst a spindly alien hand up through the dirt to pull enemies below. There are a number of different play styles and vehicles to help keep the action relatively varied; climbing aboard a towering Yeti results in a swift change of direction – suddenly, you're playing *Rampage* with the world's biggest sprite, fighting an entire Russian battalion as you scroll through the wintry wastes. Easily one of the gaming moments of the year.

Alien Hominid is a joyful experience, an unashamedly simple game that makes you want to play until you can't feel your hands any more. The stunning explosions can occasionally mask incoming bullets, but with a little knowledge of levels and a lot of skill, there's no area that can't be traversed without damage. The Behemoth has done an outstanding job and, with enough support, promises it will "work to make the best games the world has ever seen." So hurry up and pay the man.



games™ FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
STYLE: Beautiful visuals take the game far beyond its Flash origins.
ACTION: Even more frantic than *Metal Slug*. We don't know how they did it, but they did…

Leap onto an enemy's back and you can hurl them as a weapon or simply bite their silly heads off.

CONTRA: SHATTERED SOLDIER
BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS
METAL SLUG 3

PS2 $29.99



No better, no worse – just as awesome, in fact. *Hominid* looks and plays exactly the same on the PlayStation2 as it does on the Nintendo console.



VERDICT 8/10
THE PERFECT BUDGET GAME



Look at him. Look how big he is.




eMag

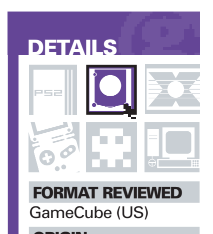

The pub is a good place to make contacts. Art reflecting life…



BATEN KAITOS: ETERNAL WINGS AND THE LOST OCEAN

GAMECUBE EXCLUSIVE –TWO WORDS WE DON'T HEAR EVERY DAY

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube (US)

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Namco

DEVELOPER
Monolith Software

PRICE
$49.99

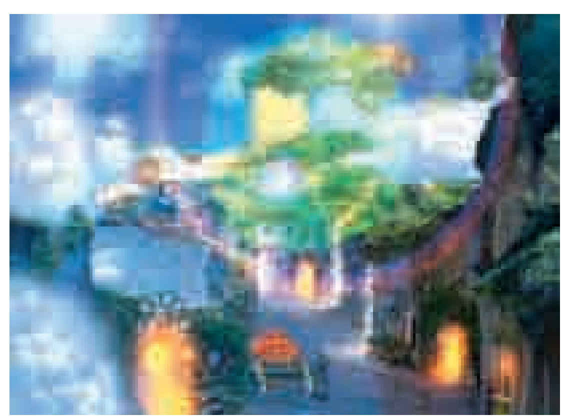
RELEASE
TBA
(Japan/US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1



Developing a big-budget RPG exclusively for a console that's desperately trying to chase a distant second place in the hardware war doesn't seem like a very shrewd business decision. But several factors came together to ensure that *Baten Kaitos* was released solely for the GameCube. Namco's close relationship with Nintendo is one reason; then there's the fact that the PS2 is swamped with good RPGs. It makes more sense to develop a game where there is a hungry audience, not a tired one, and *Baten Kaitos* was timed perfectly to fill the gaping hole in the Japanese GameCube market. In fact, this is the second time that Namco has done this, as anyone familiar with *Tales Of Symphonia* will know. The tactic is obviously working because both titles have done extremely well in Japan.

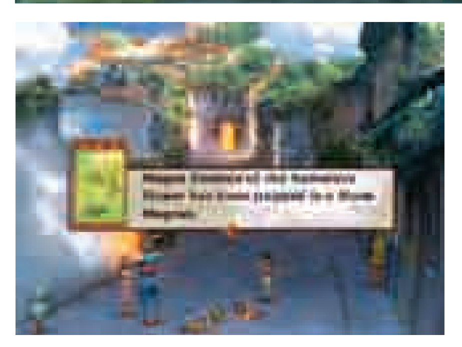
That's all well and good, but can *Baten Kaitos* successfully make the leap across the territories? This whole card battle thing is a bit… lame, isn't it? If you walk down the street and someone threatens to throw a playing card at you, you'd be forgiven for laughing. Thankfully, however, *Baten Kaitos* is a pioneer of sorts in that it approaches the card battle system in a slightly different and far more accessible way. The game takes place in a world where everyday items can be stored in card form and called upon at the

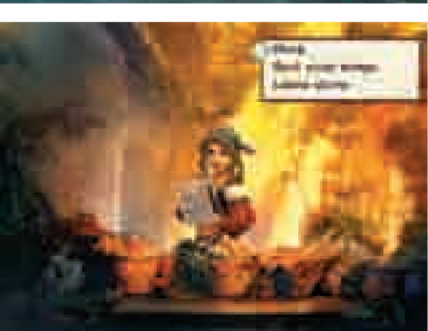

Yes, these are in-game graphics. Not bad, eh?


Increasing your Class status allows you to attack with more cards at once.



Although you're using cards, battles are almost real-time.





owner's request. This may sound ridiculous (and it is), but the theory is that an item's essence (or Magnus) is what matters, and this Magnus can be trapped. This means that when you go into battle you aren't actually throwing cards at someone: you're merely using the cards as a symbol of what you have. It's a great way of carrying a thousand items around.

One problem Monolith hasn't got around is the fact that even Magnus ages. Perishable items such as flowers, fruit and milk will ripen or go off. For example, over a few hours Green Bananas will turn into Bananas, and then into Blackened Bananas. Milk will turn into Yogurt and then into Cheese. The game puts this aspect to use in the form of time-based puzzles. In order to give someone some Cheese you'll have to first find some Milk, then let it ferment for a while. This also works in battle: whereas a Bamboo Shoot can heal you, an aged Bamboo Stick is only good for whacking opponents. Speaking of which…

At the heart of any good RPG is a good battle system, and *Baten Kaitos*' works so well because it has real-time interaction mixed in with the turn-based system. Certain combinations of cards will allow you to use 'finishing' cards – so using a Wind card with a Water card may allow you to use a Typhoon finisher. Every card also has a value in the corner (as you progress, cards have different values on each corner), and basing attacks on these numbers (by getting Straights, Flushes, Three Of A Kind) also racks up the damage. You only ever see four cards at once from your deck, and as you select a card the next one will become available, so the selection of cards is almost a real-time event. You can also defend in a similar fashion – when the enemy attacks you'll have a split second to pick some defensive cards. If your enemy uses four cards you'll see them come up at the top of the screen a moment before they're used, and you can select cards that will protect you the most. It's the most effective card system we've ever used.

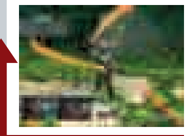
Battles take place in simplified polygon arenas, but the cities, dungeons and villages are presented in stunning, pre-rendered 2D. Three-dimensional distortion techniques such as fog have been employed to bring the 2D world to life, and every scene is full of animation, from the wildlife to water to curtains – it all makes for a lush affair. What drags *Baten Kaitos* down is a typical RPG criticism – the translation. Important conversations are voiced (whereas incidental ones are merely text); but having heard the energetic and emotional Japanese voice-over, the US equivalent is a huge letdown, being cheesy and devoid of any real emotion. This criticism aside, though, *Baten Kaitos* is a refreshing and sumptuous RPG.

QUEST-ION TIME

Exclamation marks highlight areas of interest in the game, and more often than not these will be items that you can turn into Magnus form and trap on a blank card. These Quest cards provide the basis for the game's side-quests, be they locating members of a missing family or clearing a landslide for the townsfolk. In most situations you'll be rewarded with special cards. The Constellation cards are the most valuable; collect all of these to complete the church's star map and disprove the existence of God. Or perhaps you'll just get something equally intriguing.

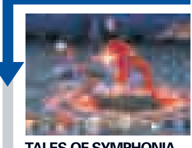


PHANTASY STAR ONLINE III: C.A.R.D. REVOLUTION



BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS



TALES OF SYMPHONIA

FAQs

Q. HOW DO YOU LEVEL UP?
Gain experience points from battles, then pray at the church to cleanse your body.

Q. WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU RUN OUT OF CARDS?
Cards are like moves: you keep them for good. You find better cards as you progress.

Q. HOW DO YOU EARN MONEY?
You can only earn money by taking photos of monsters and then selling them.

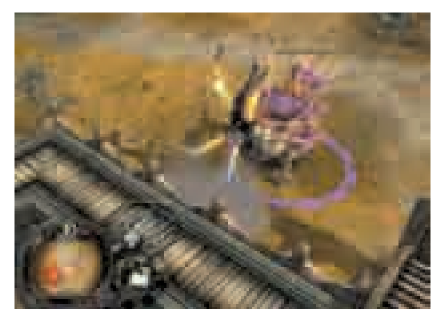


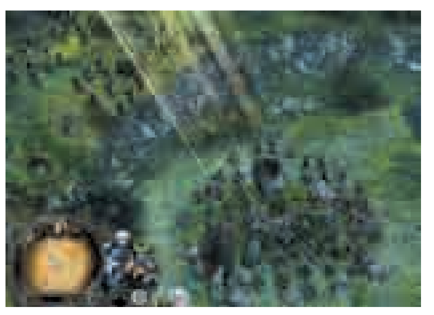


VERDICT 8/10
BEAUTIFUL AND UNEXPECTEDLY FRESH CARD BATTLER


eMag


Scenes like this make you realise how impressive the visuals are.


This forest was crawling with Ents before we torched them all.


You can take out a small army with just one of these units.

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH

"MEAT'S BACK ON THE MENU, BOYS"

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Electronic Arts

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1 (2-8 Online)

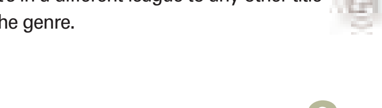
MINIMUM SPEC
Windows XP/2000, 1.3 GHz Processor, 256Mb RAM, 8x CD/DVD drive, 4Gb HDD space, DirectX 9.0b

Face it, the *Lord Of The Rings* franchise lends itself well to an RTS title. You can keep your mediocre hack-and-slash games where you have to lead that hairy footed dwarf and his 'precious' ring to some volcano; with all the fantastical races, armies, locations and monsters contained within the pages of Tolkien's books a decent RTS should have come about a long time ago. Well, sometimes you get what you wish for, and despite fears that this would be another movie-licence letdown, we were pleasantly surprised…

It's the simple things that bring the most pleasure. Creating a horde of Cave Trolls, slapping some armour on them and watching as they wallop the pathetic Riders Of Rohan with a sturdy tree trunk is one of the most amusing and satisfying things we've done – and it's largely down to how good *The Battle For Middle-Earth* looks. EA has managed to recreate the characters and landscapes of Middle-earth perfectly, and everything has a level of polish that would make Mr Sheen jealous. Whether you're watching a cut-scene or involved in a full-scale battle with Gandalf and the Ents, it's hard to not be impressed.

That said, visual quality has never been an area where the *LOTR* games have suffered; every EA title has looked great, it's just been the gameplay that's let them down. Fortunately, this is one of most involving and substantial RTSs we've played in ages, though that's perhaps unsurprising seeing as this is from the team behind the *C&C* series. The sheer scale of some of the battles is awe-inspiring, and with the same resource collection and unit creation system as the popular *C&C* games at the core of it all, there's little fuss and you'll be confidently laying siege to Helms Deep after just a few hours.

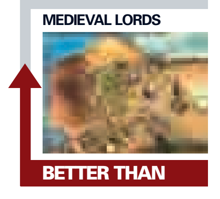
The Battle For Middle-Earth is a near-essential purchase for any fan of the genre or the films. The combination of classic RTS gameplay and stunning visuals makes for an experience that's in a different league to any other title in the genre.

VERDICT 8/10
THE BEST LOTR GAME TO DATE

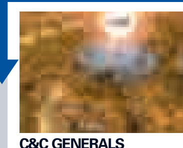


MEDIEVAL LORDS



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



C&C GENERALS

FINGERPRINT (games™)
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
LIVE THE DREAM: For fans of the film, this is probably the closest you'll get to being there.
MONSTERS, INC: Everyone wants to control the Balrog or an army of Cave Trolls – now's your chance.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox, GameCube

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Activision

DEVELOPER
Spark Unlimited

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-16 (online)

CALL OF DUTY: FINEST HOUR

CHRISTMAS IN THE TRENCHES FOR ACTIVISION'S MULTINATIONAL SHOOTER





Well, what *are* you going to do about it? Think fast, soldier

MEDAL OF HONOR: RISING SUN



BETTER THAN

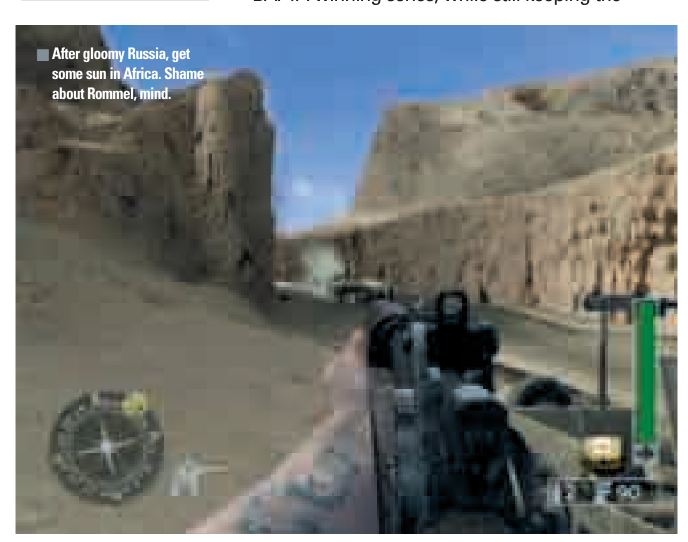
A LOT LIKE



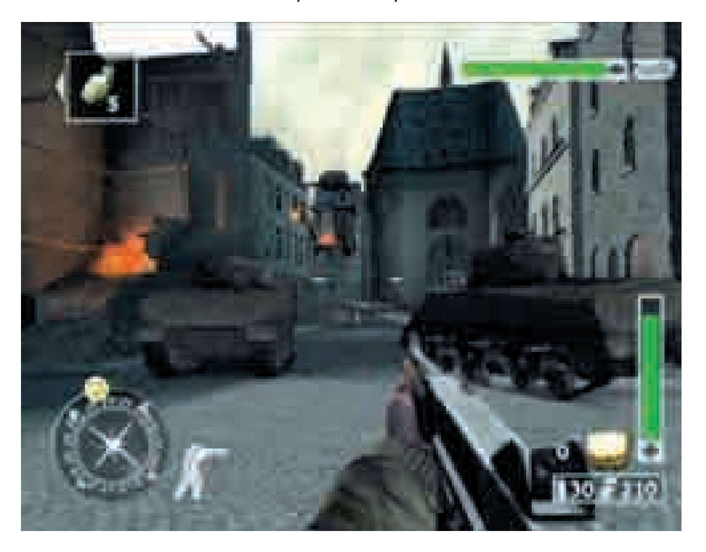
MEDAL OF HONOR: FRONTLINE

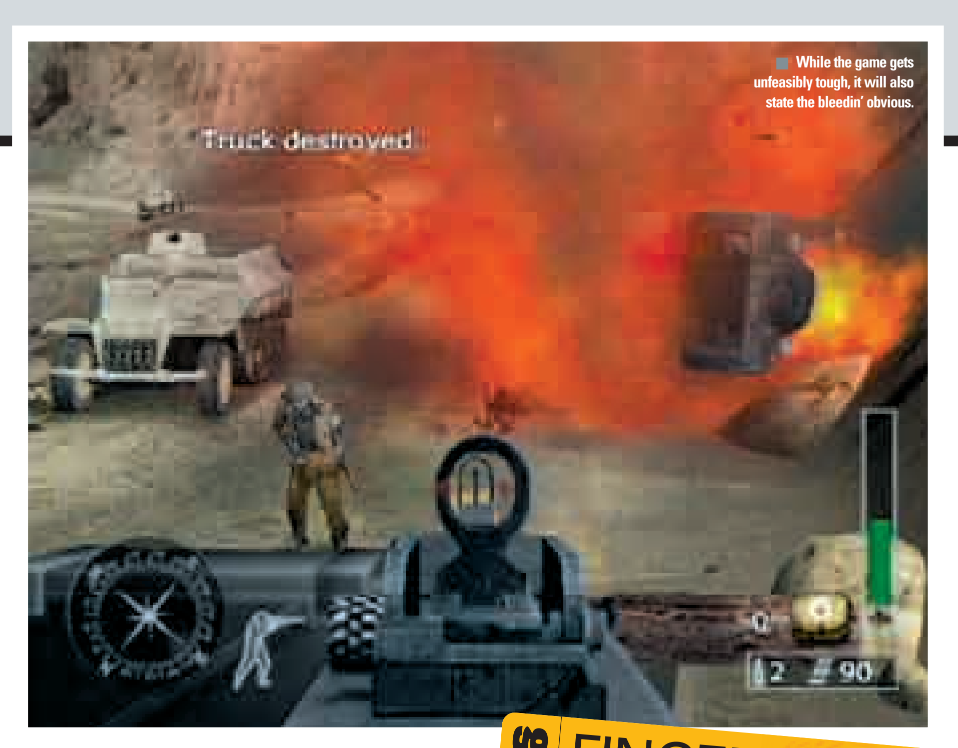
When developing a war-based title there's a definite compromise that needs to be struck between control and atmosphere. How much should it be a horrific, war-based theme park ride and how much should it actually resemble a playable game? *Medal Of Honor: Frontline* leaned heavily towards the former; as an experience of war, the Omaha beach landing is terrifying although it presents no real danger to the gamer. *Rising Sun*, on the other hand, was all hollow shooting with no believable atmosphere. However, Spark Unlimited – formed from *MOH* dev-team alumni – seems to have struck a fair balance with *Call Of Duty*'s console debut, as it manages to be both less jingoistic and less artifice-lead than EA's BAFTA-winning series, while still keeping the smoky, rubble-strewn battlefields and urgent sense of desperation that made Saving Private PlayStation so popular.

From your beginnings as a Russian grunt thrown into battle unarmed, the passion of your fellow troops is so vehement and guided by war politics as to cause discomfort – you are told early on of your "sworn duty to kill the Germans", and are soon asked to fulfil that duty by slaughtering thousands of them. But the initial stages of *Finest Hour* are very much about avoiding the battle rather than playing Rambo; the enemy tracers whipping across the Stalingrad sky present a marked danger to anyone standing upright rather than crawling through trenches, while missions would rather see you travel by



After gloomy Russia, get some sun in Africa. Shame about Rommel, mind.

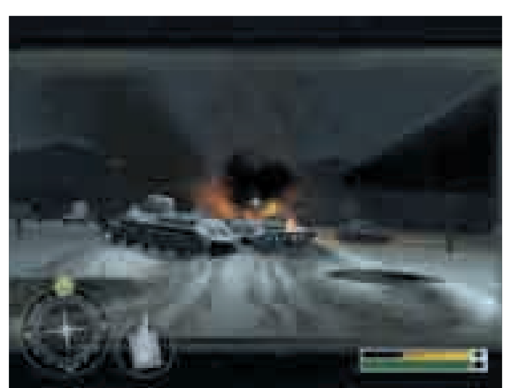




While the game gets unfeasibly tough, it will also state the bleedin' obvious.

WORLD WAR, TOO

Those left disappointed by *Finest Hour*'s slightly spasmodic AI will benefit greatly from the online game, which matches 16 supposedly intelligent gamers to battle it out together. Four modes have been implemented, including the standard Deathmatch and Capture The Flag, though the highlight of *Call Of Duty* online is likely to be Search And Destroy. A team-based event reminiscent of *Counter-Strike* where one team attempts to plant a bomb while the other impedes its progress as much as possible, Search And Destroy was a popular online feature of the original PC title, but has here been tweaked so that players are not limited to a set number of lives per round – which could either slightly improve or completely unbalance the gameplay.



sewer than take any direct (and more cinematically contrived) route through the melee. However, Spark never allows you to forget that outside the restrictive confines of your first-person viewpoint there's a much, much bigger fight going on involving thousands of men. Even in the earlier attacking missions you're never a lone hero, but part of a team that is replenished as men are lost. The atmosphere is electric, the sense of making tiny in-roads to solve a great problem as satisfying as it is frustrating.

Of course, this feeling of legion is heightened by *Finest Hour*'s six shifting perspectives. In Russia, for example (which makes up a third of the game before you move onto removing Rommel from North Africa as the British, then pushing the Americans into Aachen), you also take the role of a young female sniper as well as a tank commander, with each of the roles presenting enough variation in the game's challenge to genuinely make the characters individual (after all, considering the first-person perspective there's little to openly suggest this beside the change in standard weaponry). As a result, it's also rare that the missions feel like a series of prescribed waypoints as they did so conspicuously in *Rising Sun*, as a successful goal reached with one character inevitably leads to a new series of obstacles for another.

There are immediate disappointments here, nonetheless. Enemy AI could kindly be described as 'a bit weak' on an individual basis, though when 40 troops are running at you it's of little concern as the focus of the game switches accordingly. There's also a degree of inconsistency which you might have expected the coding team to address – the way some handheld rockets need to be arced manually, while tank shells will judge angle and depth automatically, requiring you to merely point and shoot. Conversely, grenades have not been implemented with the ability to control throw distance at all, rather requiring a single button press followed by an infuriating fixed 'prime and throw' animation. This makes aiming a lob impossibly tough to judge in confined spaces, to the extent that you almost forget you can use grenades at all.

But the single biggest criticism of *Call Of Duty: Finest Hour* must be levelled at neither the presentation of war or direct gameplay elements, but the serious shortage of checkpoints by which to save progress, especially considering that some of the missions with multiple objectives can take over half an hour to complete. Even the PC title had a quicksave option included, but here each mission is limited to a single mid-point save, reducing the full campaign of the single-player game to a series of individual high walls from which to fall onto your gaming posterior with each unpredictable failure. It's a great shame, as without a Spielberg movie to use as a jump-off, *Call Of Duty: Finest Hour* is unlikely to garner either the degree of public recognition or industry harrumphs generated by *Frontline*, and needs a coherent challenge in order to truly succeed. Without it, it's left looking like a pretender to the throne despite actually being the better soldier in many ways.

games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

TRENCHFOOT: There are plenty of ways to travel, including tanks and Jeeps.

INTERNATIONAL: Not only do you take the role of US and British soldiers, but Russian forces too.

VERDICT 6/10

OKAY SHOOTER LET DOWN BY UNEVEN DIFFICULTY CURVE

FAQs

Q. MEDAL OF HONOR BEATER?
In many ways it is, but the few niggles make it seem less so.

Q. SO, IS IT REALISTIC?
Well, no. Like *Medal Of Honor* there's no bloodshed but lots of *A-Team*-style explosions.

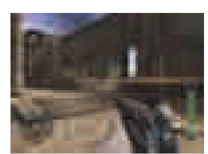
Q. ISN'T THAT A BIT IRRESPONSIBLE?
Glad you asked. And yes, it is, but then it would lose the teen market, wouldn't it?

GC £39.99 OUT NOW

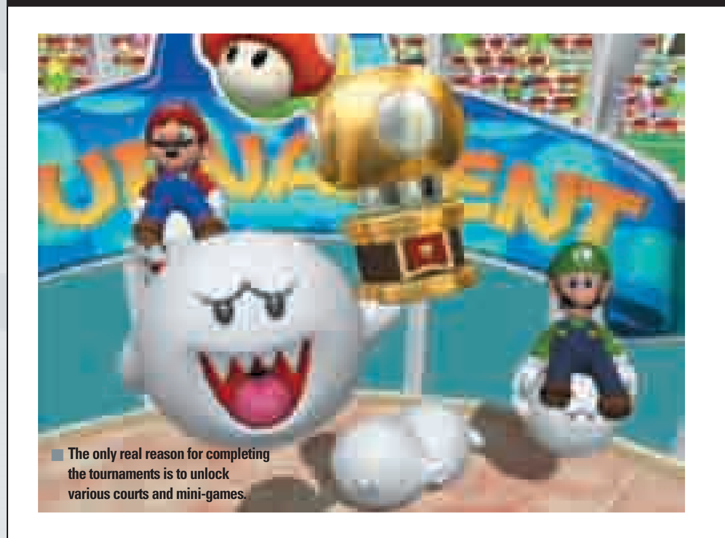


This looks more polished than the PS2 game, and has better AI than the Xbox. But particle and fire effects have taken a dip in quality, and the Cube's pad isn't up to the challenge.

XBOX £39.99 OUT NOW



Finest Hour really suffers on the Xbox. Frame rates flutter and team-mates try to walk through walls too often, but there is a slight improvement in the general graphical quality.



The only real reason for completing the tournaments is to unlock various courts and mini-games.



The mini-games are fine, but they're nothing the *Mario Party* games haven't got covered.

MARIO POWER TENNIS

CAMELOT SERVES UP A SEQUEL

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
Camelot

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
25 Feb '05

PLAYERS
4

We all remember *Mario Tennis 64* – it was once one of the best looking games on any format and its addictiveness kept you and three friends staring gormlessly into the screen for hours. With the exception of a few dodgy camera angles on the replays it was a near-perfect party game and rivalled even the mighty *Bomberman* for four-player fun. So how do you follow that?

In *Mario Power Tennis* all the characters you'd expect are waiting to take part in the Mushroom Kingdom's latest test of sporting prowess and they have a few new tricks up their sleeves. In order to try to enhance the formula that made the previous game so great, additional modes, moves and options have been piled onto the *Mario Tennis 64* base. Character-specific Power Moves have been added, Gimmick Courts included, there's a wealth of new features and at first glace it looks quite impressive.

The problem, however, is that too much has been tried and not enough has succeeded. Item Matches – which bring many of *Mario Kart*'s weapons to the tennis court – simply create a game that's near impossible to follow and just provide a feeling of randomness that ruins any enjoyment. Throw in a couple more friends for a Doubles Match, perhaps a dark *Luigi's Mansion* court where semi-translucent ghosts think it's hilarious to obscure your view, and you have a game that sees all players wondering if the colourful, shifting mass in front of them is in any way playable. The answer would almost definitely be no. With so much going on, getting any enjoyment out of the multiplayer modes is far too much work and the simple, fun aspect found in titles like *Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour* and *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* has been replaced by, well, clutter.



games™ **FINGERPRINT**

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

I'VE GOT THE POWER: Individual special moves make for the weirdest tennis experience ever.

COURT IN THE ACT: If you find regular tennis dull, there are plenty of ways to spice up a match.

Buried under all the extra modes and special moves lies much of the playability and charm of *Mario Tennis 64* – it's just much harder to find this time. By sticking to the basics it's possible to have good matches against computer opponents and friends, but there should be so much more on offer from a title that's had Nintendo fans salivating for months.



VERDICT 5/10
MARIO'S DROPPED THE BALL



Some courts will try to add a 'crazy' element to the game yet only ever seem to make a right mess.

OUTLAW VOLLEYBALL



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



TOP SPIN


eMag

ARMIES OF EXIGO

WHAT'S BLACK HOLE GOT UP ITS SLEEVIES?

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
Hungary

PUBLISHER
EA

DEVELOPER
Black Hole Entertainment

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1 (1-12)

MINIMUM SPEC
Windows 98/2000/Me/XP, 1.2GHz processor, 256Mb RAM, 1Gb HDD space, 8x CD/DVD drive, 64Mb video card, DirectX 9.0-compatible sound card

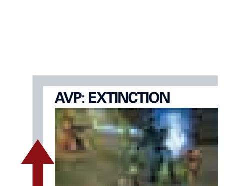
Well, it can't be said that *Armies Of Exigo* isn't true to its genre. The game starts in a way that's very familiar when dealing with an RTS that requires high levels of resource collection: some peasants are ordered to mine gold or gems, while others are dispatched to the forests to chop trees and be harassed by wolves. Farms are built to provide food for the population and you scrimp and save until you have enough food and wood to create a reasonable fighting force and enough precious metals to start the construction of a donkey. It's the simple tale of gradually building up a force that contains an exact number of each unit and then outwitting your enemy by using the environment to your advantage. That or creating an unstoppable mass of warriors that can stomp all over them while you mock their foolish tactical play – whichever works best for you.

One thing that *Armies Of Exigo* features that greatly affects the way you play is the inclusion of a sub-world on many of the maps. This is basically a second, underground map that can be accessed through tunnels or buildings with cellars. Apart from obviously adding to the size of the play area, this second tier provides new tactical opportunities that – until you get used to the second map being there – are likely to be the end of you on many occasions. On the other hand, a horde of your Knights taking an enemy by surprise by emerging unexpectedly from a tunnel and massacring the 50 Archers your opponent just spent two hours of their life and a couple of thousand in timber on is extremely satisfying. It's just a shame this satisfaction doesn't last for long.

Nope, no matter how hard you search, there's little here that wasn't done by *StarCraft*, *Age Of Empires* or any other recent RTS. While both the online options and main campaign will provide adequate enjoyment for fans of the genre, there's no worthy innovation here to raise this above any other title. Okay, *Armies Of Exigo* is Black Hole's first attempt, it's good looking and plays reasonably well – but this unlikely to make you or your wallet feel any better when you're re-treading RTS ground you've seen so many times before.

VERDICT 5/10
QUINTESSENTIAL RTS BY NUMBERS

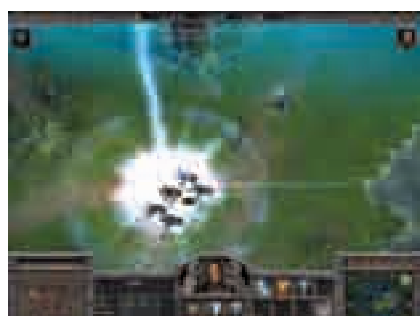
games™ FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
GOING UNDERGROUND: A map beneath the main area gives you more land to use in your attacks.
ROLL OUT: Gnome air bombers and flying craft provide some interesting ways of getting around.

AVP: EXTINCTION

BETTER THAN

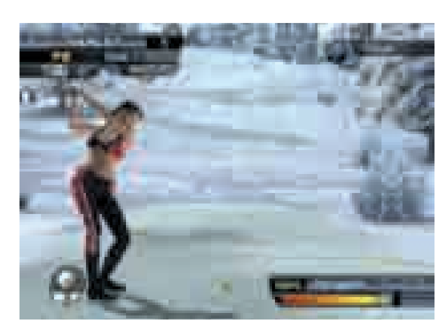

WORSE THAN

AGE OF EMPIRES II

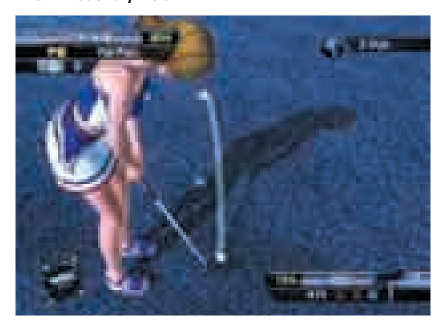

You'd think the enemies might be put off by the six Elf-filled towers waiting to fill them with arrows. They aren't.


It doesn't matter how nice the effect is – all your soldiers are still dead and your opponent is laughing at you.

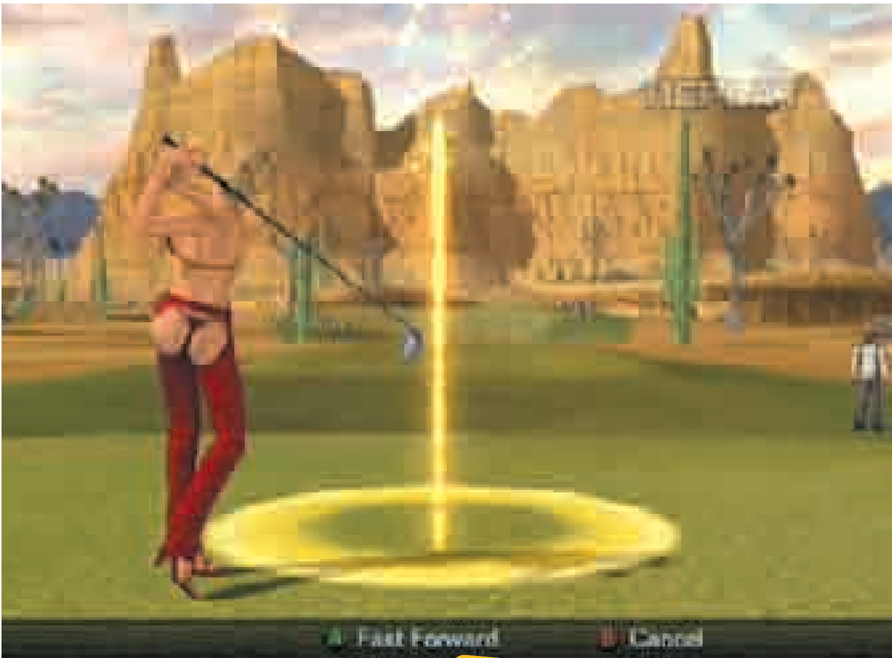

With time, wood, gold and gems it's possible to create all this. Now that's resourcefulness. Of course, whether or not you find resourcefulness interesting or entertaining, is a different matter…



From snow-covered mountains to magic mushroom-filled fields, this lot will tee off anywhere.



If you can look past the cleavage, the golf's not at all bad.



What an awesome drive. You were watching the drive, right?



games™ FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
YOU AGAIN?: Many characters have been in earlier games, but they've never behaved this badly.
GOLF RULES: Some of the better rule sets work really well when playing against friends.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox
OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2
ORIGIN
US
PUBLISHER
Take 2
DEVELOPER
Hypnotix
PRICE
£19.99
RELEASE
14 January '05
PLAYERS
1-4 (Online)

OUTLAW GOLF 2

LEAN, MEAN AND ON THE GREEN

After playing a fair bit of *Outlaw Golf* and giving *Outlaw Volleyball* a good workout we were pretty sure we knew the score with *Outlaw Golf 2*. It was doubtful we were going to get through the intro movie without seeing a selection of scantily clad lovelies; each round of golf was bound to be dripping with loutish behaviour, and the commentator would be pitching weak 'shaft' gags at a rate that would make us want to pull off our own ears. Sure enough, after 15 minutes, we'd managed to check all these boxes – but, strangely, that didn't prevent us from spending a few more hours helping deviants bap balls around.

The strange thing is, if you scrape away the thick layer of writhing strippers, brawling caddies and 'humorous' commentary you're left with a game that's notably better than many of the titles leading the genre at the moment, largely because of the challenge it provides. Unlike other golf titles, *Outlaw Golf 2* manages to continually push you regardless of how many hours you've put in. Each of the courses – although themed to include nonsensical things such as beanstalks, flyovers and ghost houses – provide some extremely difficult and well thought-out holes that Mr Woods' games just can't compete with. Who'd have thought it?

Unfortunately, taking part in the tours is frustrating due to the lack of 'actual' golf you play. Although you're still knocking a ball into a small hole, different rules will be forced upon you; if officials one day told Seve Ballesteros that the round he was about to play would abide by the obviously made-up Reverse Casino Frog Rug rules, there'd be uproar. As extras these rule sets work well, but having to play them frequently in the main Tour mode is frustrating when you want to play the real game.

Outlaw Golf 2 is actually a great game, but wading through the cut-scenes and commentary is hard work unless your sense of humour stopped developing when you were 15. However, the surprisingly technical gameplay, low price, customisable soundtrack and lure of Xbox Live all help tip the scales in favour of this being a worthy buy.

VERDICT 6/10
A FAIRWAY BETTER THAN ITS PREDECESSOR

PS2 £39.99 OUT NOW



Although gameplay and looks-wise there's little between the two formats, the lack of Xbox Live and customisable soundtrack drags the PS2 version down.

OUTLAW GOLF
BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



MARIO GOLF


The Tornado Blade emits spinning bursts of wind to clear obstacles.

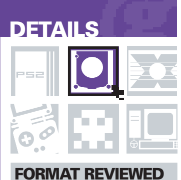

The on-rails sections see you control the way the Blade turns.


These energy refill spots are godsends, especially after a rough patch.

KURURIN SQUASH!

YOU SPIN ME RIGHT ROUND, BABY, RIGHT ROUND

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube [Japan]

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
Eighting

PRICE
¥3,800

RELEASE
TBA (Japan: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-4

Some games are created just to make you angry – the swear-inducing, pad-tossing kind of angry that can be indicative of both great and terrible game design. Thankfully, *Kururin Squash!* falls squarely into the former category. The concept behind all the *Kururin* games is directly comparable to those 'steady hand' buzzing wire games, except there's a rotating Blade instead of a handheld hoop and a convoluted maze of walls, springs and other obstacles in place of a wire.

It's the rotating bit that proves most crucial to the game's simple concept – as the Blade's reach is often wider than the gaps you have to squeeze through, you have to time the spinning of the Blade with your progress through the curved passages. Additional abilities, such as being able to increase either the Blade's forward motion or spin speed, also help in the game's many tight squeezes, even if they won't always save you from a curse-laden death. And not surprisingly, you're guaranteed to experience plenty of those.

Kururin Squash!, like its GBA cousins, isn't a game for the easily annoyed – although the fact that every mistake is clearly your fault rather than the game's makes them annoyances of the enjoyable variety. Again, it comes down to a comparison with those electric wire games; when you clip the wall for what seems like the hundredth time and explode in a shower of stars, you will curse; you will shout words that probably aren't suitable for a game so jolly and obviously 'cute'; your language will be as colourful as the title's brightly patterned backdrops. And then you'll hit Retry and start all over again.

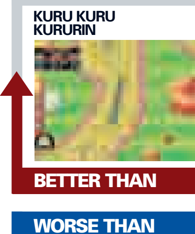
As it doesn't do much to change the series' main concept, *Kururin Squash!* introduces other elements instead to try to spice things up a little. Mainly, it's the selection of new Blades with special abilities (introduced through their own specific stages, rather than being freely selectable) that make you think a little differently; negotiating a flowing river with a submersible Blade, burning obstacles with a flame-throwing Blade or blowing away enemies with a tornado-creating Blade all require differing strategies. Even so, *Kururin Squash!* isn't nearly as challenging as its GBA predecessor and no amount of additional Time Trial, Special or GBA mini-game modes can hide its brevity. The game might be as addictive as ever, but that only means you'll see the end of it even sooner.







KURU KURU KURURIN



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

KATAMARI DAMASHII


eMag

ONE OF THE FEW GAMES THAT DESERVES AN EXCLAMATION MARK

SID MEIER'S PIRATES!



DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Atari

DEVELOPER
Firaxis Games

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

MINIMUM SPEC
Windows 98/ME/2000/XP, Pentium 1GHz, 256Mb RAM, 1.2Gb HDD space, 4x CD-ROM drive, DirectX 9-compatible 32Mb video card

You wouldn't believe how much restraint it's taken to stop this review being filled with "Arrrrr!"s and references to booty. Such is the allure of naming your captain, deciding his nationality and then being given free run of the waves that even the most cold-hearted gamer can instantly become a salty sea dog – you can only imagine how it affects anyone on the verge of believing they are a pirate. As you gain repute and build a loyal following, you'll hear shanties sung on long voyages, hear your men scream during ship combat and even have to keep them content to avoid mutiny. Oh, the perils of being a pirate captain. But boy, does it pay dividends…

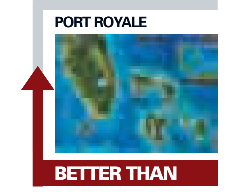
This game's main draw is its open-ended seafaring and adventuring, allowing you to pick your allegiances and quests rather than follow a linear path. Your piratical career may not last much more than ten hours but, like the *Civilization* games that also carry Meier's name, you'll be able to play in so many different ways that you may never tire of starting anew. In almost every area, the game excels – naval warfare, trading, town assaults, dancing and even landlubbing sections are all blessed with the same charm and humour so it's hard not to fall for this sugar-coated take on piracy.

While hardened thrill-seekers may not enjoy the game's sedate pace, it's obvious that every element has been crafted in such a way to keep it firmly in strategy territory rather than branching out and spreading itself too thinly between genres. Mutiny and starvation are just a few of the perils that await the ill-prepared seafarer, and once things start to go wrong they tend to spiral into jail or retirement. Attempt an escape? Divide the booty? The choice is yours.

Pirates! is a challenging and rewarding open-ended adventure – like games such as *The Sims*, you'll find yourself pumping hours into it despite the lack of an obvious or defined goal. If the contrived and regurgitated stories of the gaming world are getting you down, what better than a game that lets you write your own pirate-filled legacy?

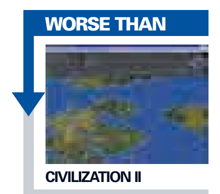
VERDICT 8/10
IN A MADE-UP WORD – BOOTYLICIOUS

PORT ROYALE

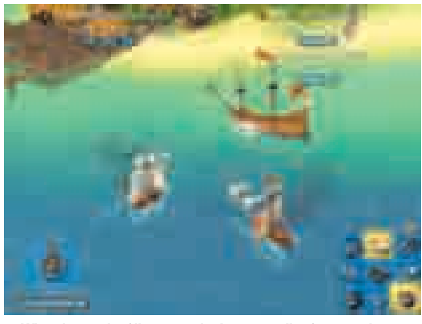


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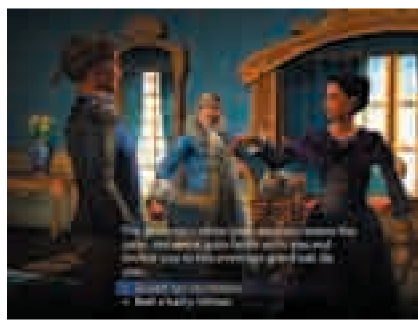
WORSE THAN



CIVILIZATION II



When the supply of limes runs dry, last one to die of scurvy wins.



Being a loveable rogue, you can choose which ladies to woo.

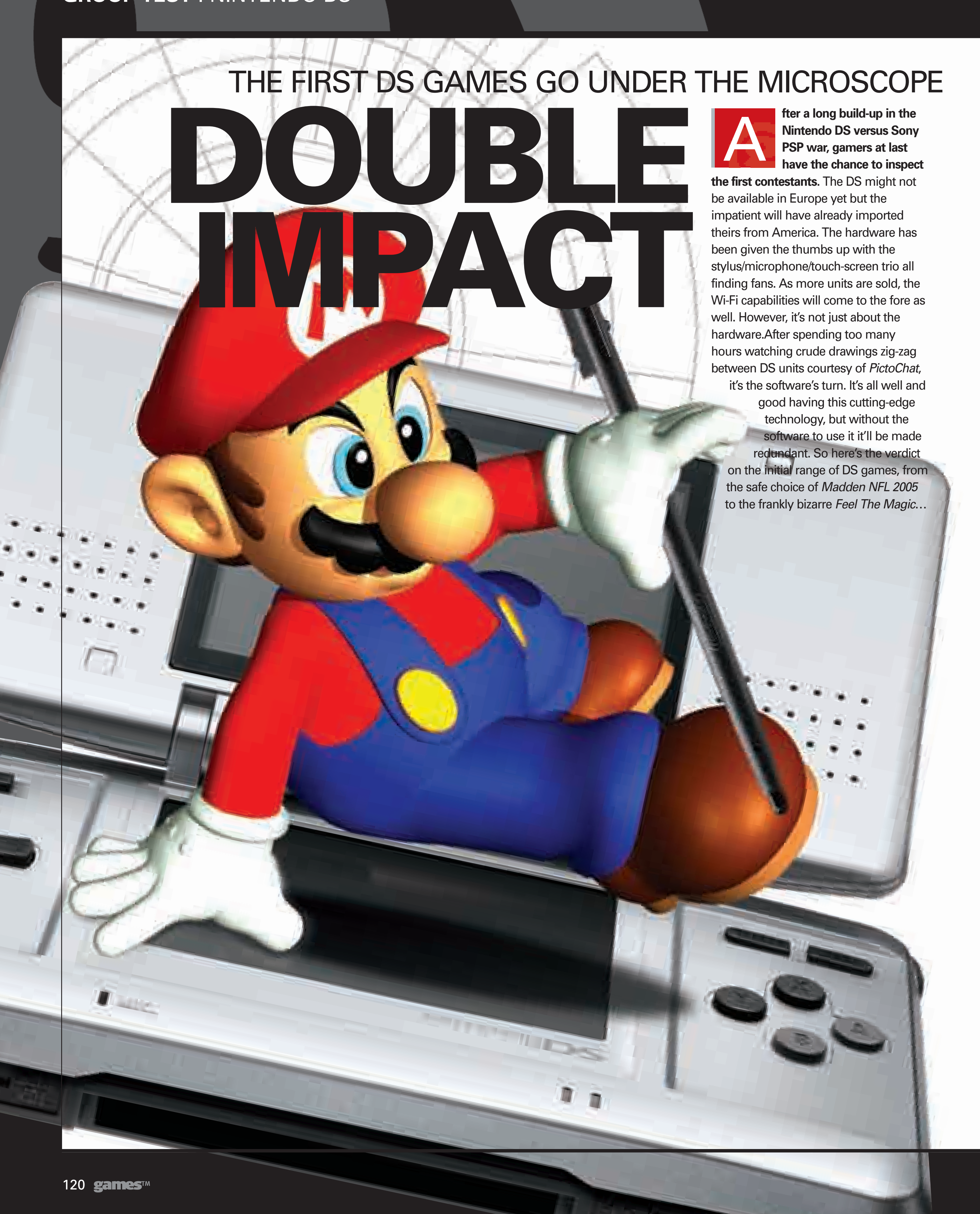


Insert your own "How appropriate, you fight like a cow" comment. Then run him through, take his ship, steal his gold and head back to port. Job done.


eMag

THE FIRST DS GAMES GO UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

DOUBLE IMPACT

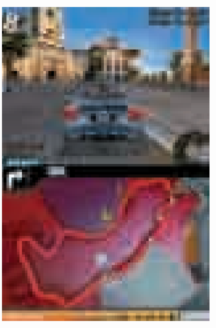
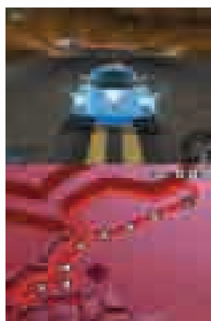


After a long build-up in the Nintendo DS versus Sony PSP war, gamers at last have the chance to inspect the first contestants. The DS might not be available in Europe yet but the impatient will have already imported theirs from America. The hardware has been given the thumbs up with the stylus/microphone/touch-screen trio all finding fans. As more units are sold, the Wi-Fi capabilities will come to the fore as well. However, it's not just about the hardware.After spending too many hours watching crude drawings zig-zag between DS units courtesy of *PictoChat*, it's the software's turn. It's all well and good having this cutting-edge technology, but without the software to use it it'll be made redundant. So here's the verdict on the initial range of DS games, from the safe choice of *Madden NFL 2005* to the frankly bizarre *Feel The Magic*…

PRESENTATION How do the graphics and sound measure up?

Asphalt Urban GT

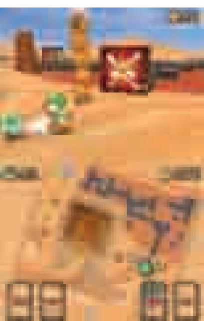
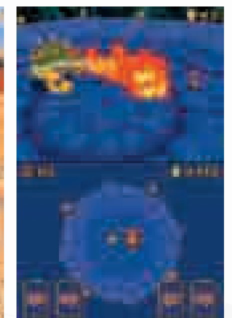
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Gameloft
PRICE: $29.99
PLAYERS: 1-4
RELEASE: Out Now

***Asphalt Urban GT* suffers in the audio stakes, with underwhelming tunes and SFX failing to convey any sense of excitement or urgency.** Fortunately, the game is up to scratch visually with smooth graphics that refuse to buckle under high speeds. Under close scrutiny the overall presentation unravels as bland textures on traffic and glitching become obvious. Even so, these are forgiveable as they don't detract from the gameplay. The only criticism that affects gameplay is that it's hard to tell background scenery from upcoming traffic on the horizon, as everything blurs together into a mess of colour.

Super Mario 64 DS

ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
PRICE: $29.99
PLAYERS: 1-4
RELEASE: Out Now

Bright, buoyant and surprisingly harsh on the eye – that's *Super Mario 64 DS*. After the soft focus of the N64 original, the rougher textures of this version seem a step backwards. Newcomers won't notice the difference as Mario's world still looks strikingly beautiful, while the sound effects and music are almost on par with the original. The veterans will grumble, but it's still amazing to see how faithfully this adventure has been shrunk onto a handheld without losing its scope or size. Does it look nicer than the original? No, but the fact this question has to be asked is proof the DS is no graphical slouch.

Madden NFL 2005

ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: EA
PRICE: $29.99
PLAYERS: 1-2
RELEASE: Out Now




Perhaps the biggest indicator that the DS can match the 32-bit console generation is *Madden NFL 2005*, as it conjures up memories of similar titles on PlayStation and Saturn. The muddy textures, weightless animation and 3D competency of *Madden NFL 2005* are all hallmarks (good and bad) of the previous generation of consoles. While you'll want clearer visuals as the players charge towards the ball, graphics are hard to fault. However, the licensed tunes sound crunchy, and the presentation feels very bare compared to usual EA standards, though that's the fault of the developer not the DS.

The Urbz: Sims In The City

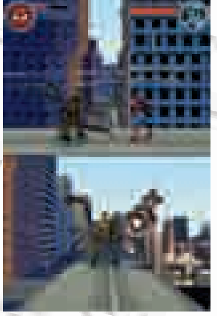
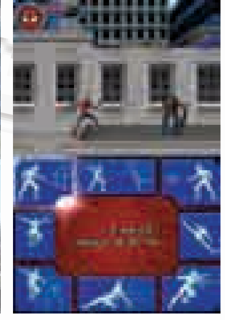
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: EA
PRICE: $29.99
PLAYERS: 1
RELEASE: Out Now




Perhaps the most disappointing of the bunch, being little more than a copy of the Game Boy Advance version. Games don't always have to push the capability of hardware to provide an experience that's fulfilling visually and aurally but *The Urbz* simply comes across as lazy and unambitious. The dour colour schemes feel lifeless and lack the chemical fizz that embodied *The Sims*, while animations don't convey any personality. While graphically disappointing, the music and continuous 'Simlish' chatter ensure *The Urbz* manages to tick at least one box on the presentation checklist.

Spider-Man 2

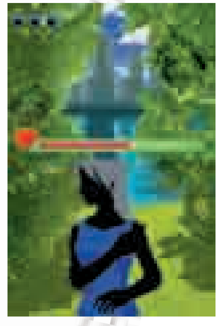
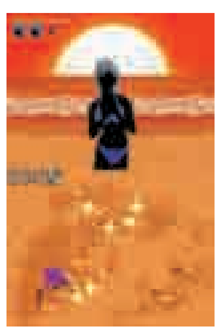
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Activision
PRICE: $29.99
PLAYERS: 1
RELEASE: Out Now

***Spider-Man 2* on the Game Boy Advance had 3D sections that proved too much for that system, but you'll have trouble believing the DS version couldn't have been done on the GBA.** Graphics are pseudo-3D with the camera turning to give the impression that Spidey is doing more than just running left or right. It's a trick that's worked in the past but will have trouble convincing cynical eyes that the DS is pulling handheld gaming into new territory. The developer admitted this game was made quickly for the DS launch and it shows. The only milestone is the cut-scenes, the closest handheld gaming has come to film quality.

Feel The Magic: XY/XX

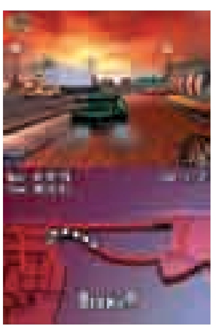
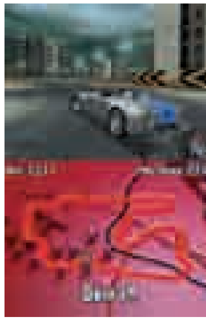
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Sega
PRICE: $29.99
PLAYERS: 1
RELEASE: Out Now

"Rub it!" Having instructions screamed at you in childish voices is just one way *Feel The Magic* makes its presence known, and after the bizarre music has drawn crowds the graphics pull no punches. The abstract visual style of *Feel The Magic* would create its own set of fans anyway, with more personality in its blank avatars than most games can manage in their fully adorned characters. The minimalist graphics ensure that both screens contain an eye-catching colour explosion with no glitches or slowdown to be seen. In the initial batch of games, this is the most distinctive graphically and musically.

GAMEPLAY Will you be coming back for more?

Asphalt Urban GT

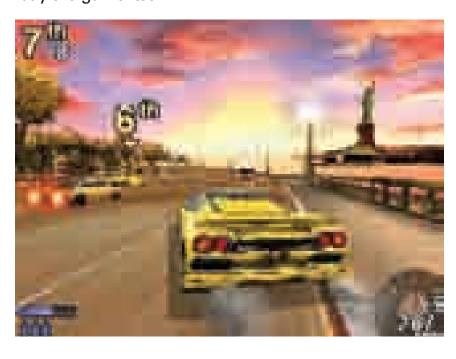



Without the touch-screen novelties to dilute the spotlight on the game's handling, it's important that *Asphalt Urban GT* nails this aspect perfectly to ensure it keeps face amongst the more ambitious DS titles. Unfortunately, this is where the game slips up, with the handling feeling too cumbersome to allow for slick racing. This comes in stark contrast to how lightweight the crashes are, with your car either spinning once before driving on or coming to a complete halt.

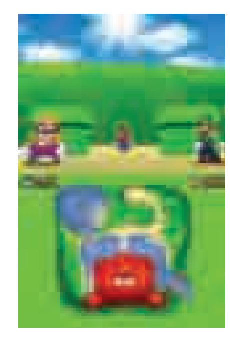
The boost bar has been pinched from under *Burnout*'s nose but in its haste to implement this feature, Gameloft has omitted *Burnout*'s sense of urgency and speed. As you'd expect, drifting and near misses fill the boost bar and turbo boosts can be stored, but there's no sensation of speed when using these and it doesn't even appear to favour your car that much, as you don't gain much ground on rivals.

"FOR **COMPLETISTS**, ASPHALT URBAN GT'S **SAVING GRACE** IS THE AMOUNT OF **LICENSED CARS** TO UNLOCK"

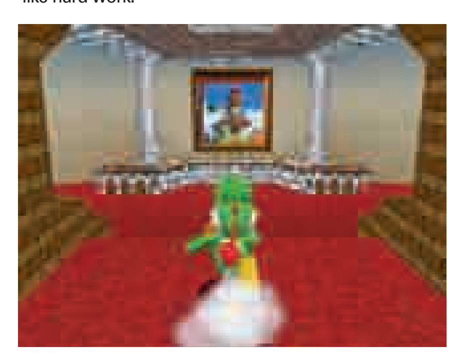
For completists, *Asphalt Urban GT*'s saving grace is the amount of licensed cars to unlock along with plenty of championships to get stuck into. They follow the frustrating baby-steps structure of playing through one at a time, allowing no flexibility to change vehicles, although the tuning options will please car enthusiasts. Despite that, the similar handling for every vehicle means *Asphalt Urban GT* relies heavily on its Wi-Fi multiplayer for any replay value, and due to the low profile and dubious quality of the game itself it's debatable whether you'll find enough fellow owners to justify this aspect of the game or, indeed, buy the game itself.



Super Mario 64 DS




Whether using the thumb strap, stylus or D-pad, there's no denying that whatever combination you use, the controls lack the discipline of the analogue stick. As such, you'll find Mario running a little further than you want him to or refusing to walk in the exact direction you're pressing. Encouraging Mario into a series of gymnastic leaps and turns won't be as effortless as you remember, yet it still doesn't seem like hard work.

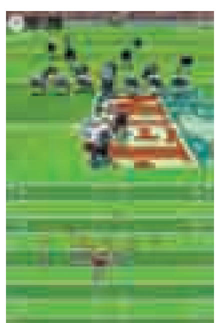


"THE NEW CHARACTERS, THE POWER-UPS, THE SURPRISES THROUGHOUT… ALL ADD SPICE **TO AN OLD FORMULA** THAT SHOULD BE WELL WORN BUT **DEFIES ITS AGE"**

The extra nuances introduced into the main adventure – the new characters, the power-ups, the surprises throughout – add extra spice to an old formula that should be well worn but defies its age. The level design has aged particularly well and all the intricate puzzles and demands on your gaming abilities remain as satisfying to complete now as they did back in 1996.

The map can be construed as a lazy addition but it'll prove invaluable for new gamers overwhelmed by the scope of *Super Mario 64 DS*. It will prove just as useful when chasing all 150 Stars, which will be tough enough for most gamers – collecting the original's 120 was no mean feat, after all. The sheer number and quality of mini-games will provide replayability in bursts once the main adventure has been defeated and some could easily merit a full game by themselves.

Madden NFL 2005

***Madden NFL 2005* is as predictable and competent as you might expect from EA.** There are no new gameplay features per se, merely the additions that take advantage of the DS's capabilities. As such, *Madden NFL 2005* offers no surprises and no-frills gameplay to anyone who has spent time with previous titles. Those new to the series will find it hard learning the rules of American football alongside the tactical nuances, let alone adjusting to ergonomics of the DS design in a game that demands split-second decisions on which button to press. This is especially apparent on plays that demand use of the shoulder buttons, drawing attention to just how wide the DS is.

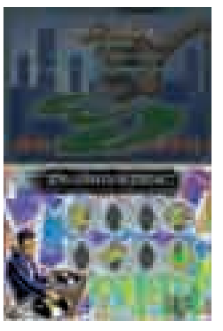
"TWO-PLAYER WI-FI **WON'T MAKE A HUGE IMPACT** IN THE UK, WHERE THE NUMBER OF COPIES SOLD **WILL BE SIGNIFICANTLY LOWER** THAN IN THE US"

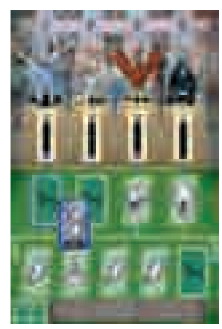
But once the rules and tactics have been mastered, *Madden NFL 2005* becomes a deep and rewarding game. Two-player Wi-Fi for the series won't make a huge impact in the UK, where the number of copies sold will be significantly lower than the US, but there's enough reward for single players to make *Madden NFL 2005* worth the time and patience necessary to learn the game.

Season mode comes complete with the customary fantasy draft, confirming this as a 'safe' title for the DS. Even so, *Madden NFL 2005* is a good choice to spearhead EA's sports assault on new hardware and an easy weapon for Nintendo of America's marketing department.



The Urbz: Sims In The City





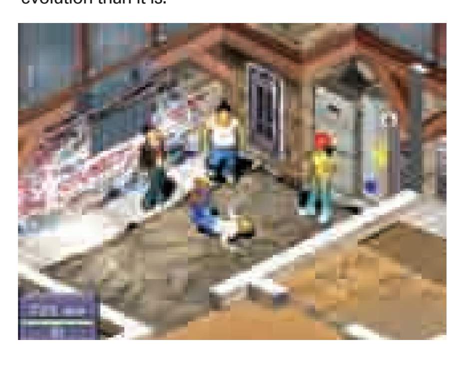
Get a job, get a promotion, dress to please, fit in with the crowd. While *The Urbz* still suffers from the identity problem of trying to offer slow-burning *Sims* gameplay with console pace and structure (not to mention the dubious morals required to get ahead), it suits gaming on the move better than sitting in front of the TV. There's variety to try to usher gamers through to the end, with detective missions, bike races and basketball mini-games just a sample of what you can find, though the game still feels empty.

Splicer Island is the DS-exclusive highlight and thus gets the most attention. It starts as an off-limits laboratory and you need to figure out how to get access. It's surprisingly convoluted, given that this

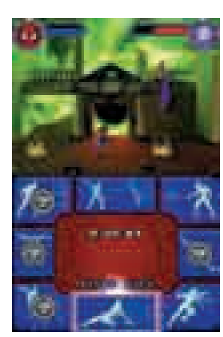
"THIS IS THE CLOSEST A HANDHELD HAS COME TO THE SIMS, BUT IT'S HARD TO SHAKE THE FEELING THAT THIS SHOULD HAVE BEEN MORE OF AN EVOLUTION"

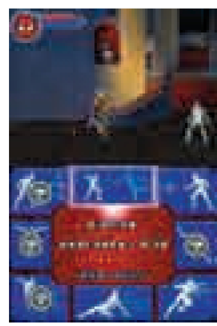
opens up the only real advantage this version holds over its console and handheld brethren, but once you're there you can play the amber-cutting mini-games and begin creating pets. The better you are at cutting the amber, the rarer the pet you can create.

If that bores you, which is probably due to the arduous nature of the mini-games, there are seven DS missions as opposed to the five on the Game Boy Advance version. There's enough gameplay to get stuck into and it's the closest a handheld has come to *The Sims*, but it's hard to shake the nagging feeling that this, being on the DS, should be more of an evolution than it is.



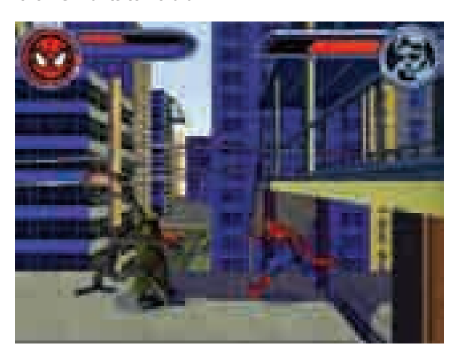
Spider-Man 2





Spider-Man 2 **might be on the next generation of handhelds but it's as clichéd and hackneyed as most other handheld platformers.** Levels are packed with the usual steam and fire obstacles, ensuring the pace never warms up beyond glacial while spiralling into ever more complex 2D labyrinths that demand a map or some sort of guidance to help you along.

These levels are punctuated by repetitive combat, and while switching moves is a nice touch it barely disguises the button-bashing trap *Spider-Man 2* falls into. Fighting a series of generic enemies, whose AI consists of running towards you in a straight line and punching, isn't the type of gameplay advance that the DS wants to herald.

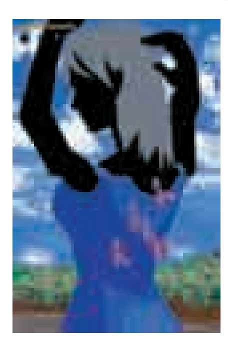


"FIGHTING A SERIES OF GENERIC ENEMIES – WHO MERELY RUN AND PUNCH – ISN'T THE SORT OF GAMEPLAY ADVANCE THAT THE DS WANTS TO HERALD"

The only real achievement is the limited joy that comes from swinging through the city. Spider-Man's fluid sense of movement when he leaves the ground means he's screaming to break out of the two dimensions developer Vicarious Visions has shackled him into. The levels stay unlocked so there's the option to revisit your favourite parts of the game yet there are no sections that really stand out.

Without two-player or any real incentive to visit the levels again other than to take another peek at the various cut-scenes, *Spider-Man 2* is likely to gather dust once it's been completed – and that may not take you too long.

Feel The Magic: XY/XX





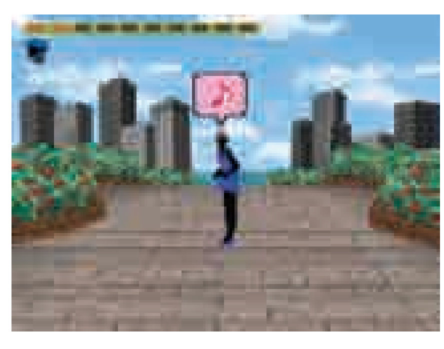
Rubbing a goldfish and poking bulls might not be the traditional way to impress a date but ***Feel The Magic*** **is far from a traditional game – which is fitting, given its abstract style.** This game consists entirely of mini-games that revolve around the central idea of your character impressing a date with plenty of visual indicators to tell you how well you're doing. There's enough scope in this storyline to encompass a wide range of bizarre mini-games although compared to the machine-gun speed of *Wario Ware*, *Feel The Magic*'s drawn-out pace does prove its undoing at times.

While boss battles benefit from the extended time limit, some mini-games simply aren't strong enough

"THIS IS A TITLE YOU'LL REVISIT AS YOU'LL BE ABLE TO DIP BACK INTO YOUR FAVOURITE MINI-GAMES AND IGNORE THE ONES YOU DON'T AGREE WITH"

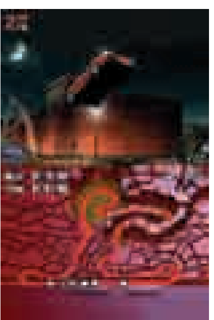
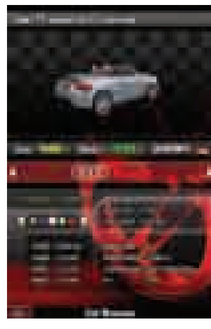
to sustain themselves on the touch-screen novelty alone, allowing too many lingering looks at its flaws. Even so, it's a title you'll revisit as you'll be able to dip back into your favourite mini-games and ignore the ones you don't agree with.

Unlockable Maniac mode also allows you to dress the object of your desire in various hats and outfits. There's even an option to insert Sega Game Boy Advance games and unlock further items, such as the cap seen in *NiGHTS*. That alone should see *Feel The Magic*'s lifespan extended, not to mention a desperate rummage around to find your old Game Boy Advance games.



HARDWARE Is the machine used in the best possible way?

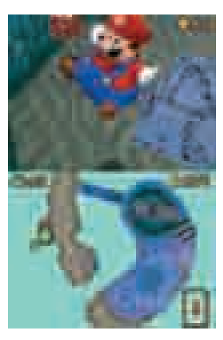
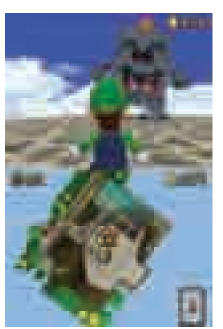
Asphalt Urban GT

Saying *Asphalt Urban GT* uses the touch screen is far too generous – apart from navigating the various menu screens (which can be done more effectively with the D-pad) the innovative stylus control is barely used. The racing controls use the D-pad and buttons, with the stylus and touch screen only used to call up the pause menu. It's lazy and unforgiveable, especially when you consider that *Ridge Racer DS* offers touch-screen control options, no matter how well implemented they turn out to be.

The Wi-Fi is used for multiplayer racing and, unlike *Metroid Prime: Hunters*, which didn't always prove reliable at a distance, *Asphalt Urban GT* seems to hold up well when played between machines. This doesn't compensate for the lack of ambition elsewhere but it's a nice bonus nonetheless.

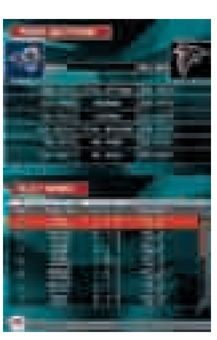
Super Mario 64 DS

***Super Mario 64 DS* arguably does more to exploit the various uses of the DS than any other game.** Hardly surprising, seeing as this has come from Nintendo, but credit is due for implementing so many unique DS features. The controls are the most obvious point of reference, with various schemes that can be configured to whatever feels most comfortable. The thumb strap, stylus, touch screen and buttons can all be combined, and while nothing can replace the analogue stick of the original, most who played this found a good substitute.

The mini-games are up with *Feel The Magic* for innovative use of the stylus, and whether firing catapults, moving bombs or poking faces, there's an undeniable allure to using such a simple control mechanism. Wi-Fi multiplayer completes an ambitious package that shows what the DS can do.

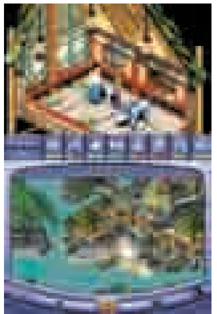
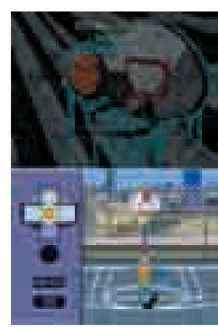
Madden NFL 2005




The touch screen lets you select plays with your thumb, but it doesn't make the process any more secretive or disguised than using the traditional D-pad; if anything, your thumb can give away what you're selecting. It's merely meant as a more intuitive way of picking plays so doesn't offer any huge gameplay leaps. Wi-Fi allows for time-honoured team-versus-team action, and not being able to see the opponent's plays until the ball is thrown adds a new strategic layer.

However, having the radar on the bottom screen is rather pointless; while it should help you pick plays more efficiently, there are too many intangibles on the top screen to make the radar a preferable option (it can't tell who you're throwing to, how fast they're running and so on). Ultimately, it's the sports game equivalent of having a map on the bottom screen.

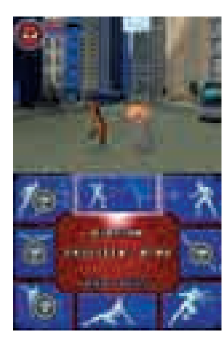
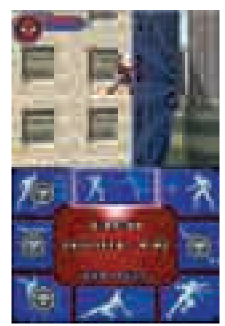
The Urbz: Sims In The City

The mini-games exclusive to the DS version are designed to take full advantage of the touch screen. For example, one game requires you to draw through a piece of amber to reach the preserved DNA at its core to unlock further pet parts. It's a clever idea that fits the game world's logic but the execution is poor as the accuracy isn't there and completing these mini-games feels more like a trial of luck than judgment.

There are plenty of other DS riffs (scratching records on the title screen being one example) but again, they feel tacked onto the GBA *Urbz* structure rather than fully integrated into the game. The only time the DS adds something new is the feature that allows you to paint pictures to hang in your home. Although under-realised, this does hint at potential for drawing to be incorporated in other games.

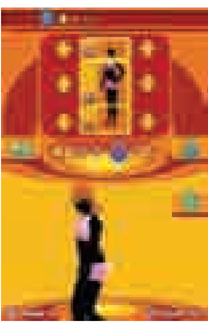
Spider-Man 2

The touch screen has two purposes: switching between moves and fighting bosses. During the game the bottom screen shows moves that can be used once they're pressed; this allows you to change techniques mid-bout, although it takes impressive finger gymnastics to master and never feels fluid. Meanwhile, the boss battles switch to touch-screen combat, requiring you to tap the screen to deflect debris or hit the boss. It doesn't add anything to the gameplay and *Spider-Man 2* leaves you feeling that it's using the DS's capabilities simply for the sake of it.

Ironically, the one time a map is needed is the one time it isn't there – with the levels turning into sprawling mazes you're often left cursing the move-switching ability when simple guidance via a map would prove far more useful.

Feel The Magic: XY/XX

As one of the two available games that uses the microphone, *Feel The Magic* already stands out from the crowd for the mini-games where you blow on the touch screen. It should also be pointed out that all the mini-games use the touch screen or microphone and the D-pad is completely shunned, further cementing *Feel The Magic*'s reputation for innovative gameplay.

As you need the pin-point accuracy of the stylus to play the majority of mini-games, your hand is perched over the screen and therefore covers almost half of it. This isn't a problem until you need to see the covered side of the screen to complete certain games, such as being attacked by sharks from both sides of the screen while trying to guide a unicycle along a narrow ledge. The GBA backwards compatibility is also well used – this is the only title so far to really exploit this feature.

OVERALL So what's the verdict?

Asphalt Urban GT

While clearly hurried along in time for the Nintendo DS launch, it seems *Asphalt Urban GT* will fail to benefit from its enviable timing. It bears the hallmarks of a game rushed to meet a deadline and its refusal to use the touch screen is the biggest faux pas a launch game can commit on the DS, given that Nintendo's new handheld is meant to encourage innovative gaming. The mobile gaming roots of Gameloft are apparent when you see the simple handling of the cars and how *Asphalt Urban GT* relies on fellow owners of the game to provide multiplayer and, thus, any sort of enjoyment. The low profile and dubious quality will make finding fellow owners of the game difficult, so there's little to recommend when *Ridge Racer DS* has yet to put in an appearance.



VERDICT 3/10
LIMITED AND ONE-DIMENSIONAL

The Urbz

***The Urbz: Sims In The City* is an average experience and therefore receives an average score.** The touch screen mini-games seem an afterthought – EA's way of excusing what is basically a Game Boy Advance *Urbz* re-release in all but name. That version had its flaws so releasing the same game with a few minor additions isn't going to fool anyone. Even though it should be relatively deep for a handheld title, *The Urbz* doesn't offer the required replayability and simply doesn't work hard enough to justify a full-price purchase when there are other superior titles to choose from. The slender competition represents the only chance *The Urbz* has of shifting big numbers. This game knows what it likes but it isn't different enough, and that isn't enough to entice new DS owners to its corner.



VERDICT 5/10
AVERAGE IN EVERY WAY

Madden NFL 2005

There's no denying the limited appeal of American football to British gamers, especially when compared to, say, a *FIFA* title. Nevertheless, the importing minority is usurped by the American majority and so *Madden NFL 2005* is a no-brainer as EA's first game for the DS. The cluttered visuals make this the ugly duckling of the launch line-up, as the looks certainly aren't on par with the gameplay. Deep and rewarding, if physically a little uncomfortable to play on the DS, this game will set the tone for future EA titles. The software giant will undoubtedly grow more confident with the DS and experiment with the touch screen, before cross-pollinating its sports games with the more successful ideas. For now, though, this is the plug-in before EA's sports games become guinea pigs for new ideas, and it's a nice taster of things to come.

VERDICT 6/10
EA PLAYS IT SAFE ON HOME GROUND

Super Mario 64 DS

Compared with the Nintendo 64 original, *Super Mario 64 DS* is, inevitably, a failure. However, when taken on its own merits, it's a triumph for Nintendo and a genuine boon for the DS launch line-up. There's plenty of platforming meat in the main game whether this is your first or second time through Mario's world, and Nintendo has worked on every element of its new baby to ensure this spiritual update to arguably the great platform game hits all the right notes. Aside from the technical marvel of managing to squeeze this all onto a handheld, by far the most pleasing aspect of *Super Mario 64 DS* is the consistent quality of the new mini-games, with the bombs and the catapult game adding something to dip into alongside the lure of the main adventure itself.

VERDICT 8/10
THE PICK OF THE BUNCH

Spider-Man 2

This would have been acceptable on the Game Boy Advance but seeing this title on the DS is asking for a little too much leniency from gamers. There are a number of me-too platformers available for Game Boy Advance and apart from the cut-scenes and pseudo-3D look found here, *Spider-Man 2* could easily pass as one of them. The sub-sections in the boss battles annoy rather than please while the move-changing abilities will be neglected once you find a preferred move to use all the time. With those two features relegated to minor novelties, that leaves this DS iteration struggling to earn merit on gameplay alone. Full credit to Vicarious Visions for creating a whole new game instead of porting the Game Boy Advance version to the DS but, unfortunately, it's hard to tell what it achieved by doing so.

VERDICT 4/10
DISAPPOINTING PETER PARKER DEBUT

Feel The Magic: XY/XX

This has been the cult favourite so far, even threatening to overtake *Super Mario 64 DS* in terms of profile. The abstract presentation of the game has already found many fans, and being in the company of safer games such as *Madden NFL 2005* and *The Urbz* further enhances its reputation. The backwards compatibility is a clever touch and sure to reassure those who don't believe the Game Boy Advance and DS can co-exist. *Feel The Magic* isn't a long game and there's the possibility that once the initial rush of novelty and euphoria surrounding this title dies down it will disappear in *Wario Ware*'s shadow. Even so, this represents an unusual and attention-grabbing way for Sonic Team and Sega to make their entrances on a new platform and will succeed among the initial batch of launch games.

VERDICT 7/10
SURPRISING HIT FROM SONIC TEAM

DOUBLE TROUBLE?

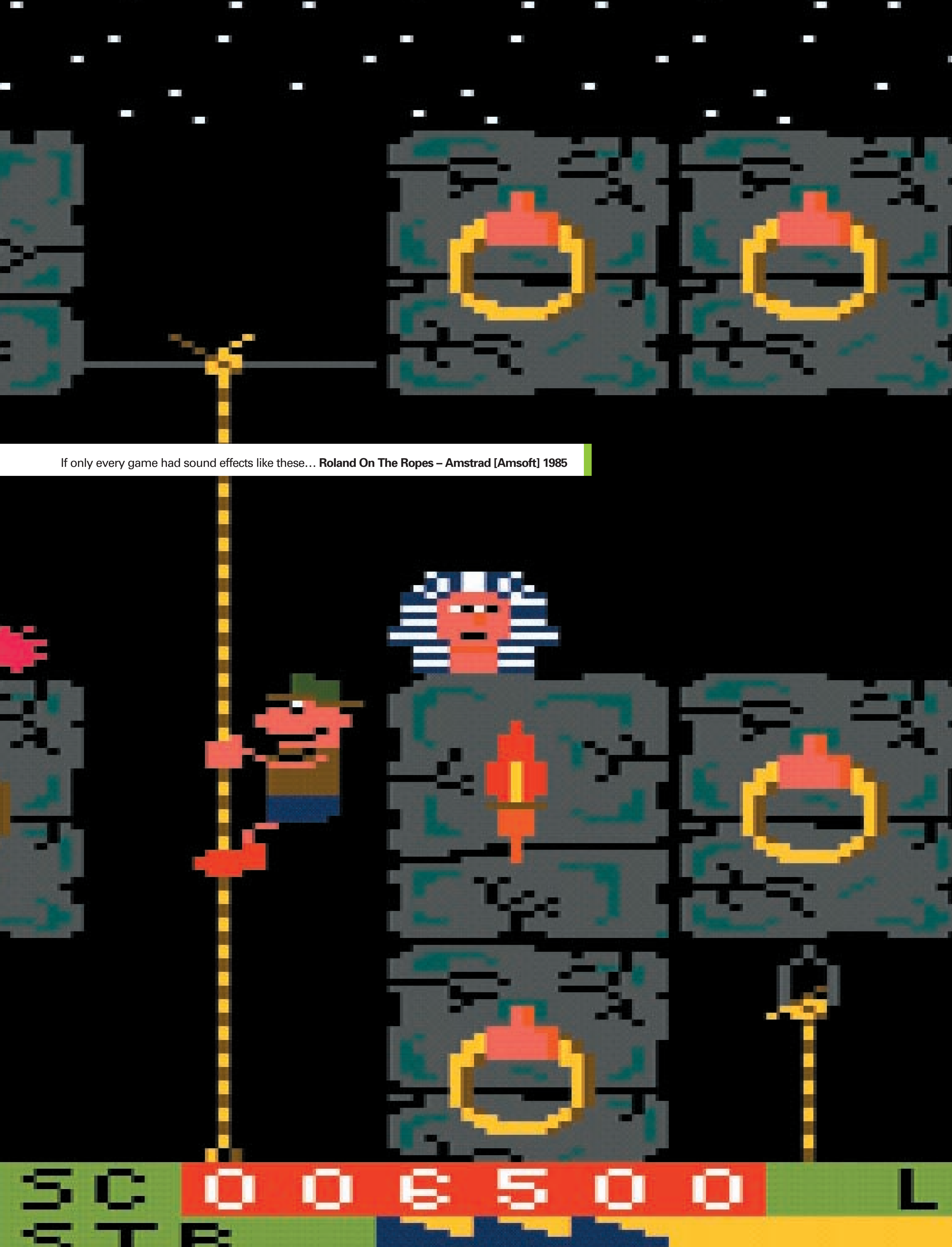
LOOKING BACK AT THE LAUNCH

The huge number of Nintendo DS pre-orders in America ensured the launch day was a success well in advance of the crunch date. This was a victory in itself, given what a departure from Game Boy evolution the DS represents. The *Metroid Prime: Hunters* demo and *PictoChat* provided the novelty, and with *Super Mario 64 DS* and *Feel The Magic* there are enough games to convince non-believers of what the Nintendo DS can do.

There are better things to come in the shape of *Advance Wars* and *Mario Kart*, and with such innovative hardware to work with the sky's the limit for the second wave of software. The Japanese launch for the DS will likely have a bigger impact, given that region's affinity for Game Boy Advance and the improved launch line-up, yet Nintendo got the American launch it undoubtedly wished for.

It didn't all go smoothly, though. *Mr Driller* was limited to only 5,000 copies on launch day, an oversight by Namco's own admission, while Nintendo has also been hampered by dead-pixel problems, where a pixel on the bottom screen remains unlit. The response from Nintendo's customer services has been lethargic, offering a 'wait and see' response before gamers decide to send the DS back to Nintendo – hardly an enthusiastic or helpful response to erase the only negative press Nintendo has received post-launch.

The outlook for the DS is bright but Nintendo would do well to take on board lessons from the past – treat gamers with contempt and expect the same attitude in return.



If only every game had sound effects like these… **Roland On The Ropes – Amstrad [Amsoft] 1985**


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eMag



RETRO
MICRO GAMES ACTION
A PARAGON PUBLICATION
NO.27 JAN 2005
00p
THE MONTHLY OLD-SCHOOL SOFTWARE REVIEW
SHOOTING STARS
WE TAKE A LOOK AT SOME OF THE BEST SATURN SHMUPS
WISH YOU WERE THERE...?
LOOKING BACK AT RETRO GAMING AROUND THE WORLD
CONTRA III: ALIEN WARS
GREATEST GAME EVER?
WHY DON'T THEY REMAKE RAMPART?
PILOT WINGS
A GREAT GAMING MOMENT
PLUS
RETRO NEWS, RISING SUN RETRO, BUYERS' GUIDE, RETRO CONTACT, ULTIMATE COLLECTION AND MUCH MORE...

RETRO NEWS

Find out what's going on in the here and now of retro gaming

Isn't it amazing what you miss when it's gone? An imminent new arrival and a lack of space at home has meant that my precious retro collection is now little more than a memory and I'm very, very sad.

My beloved SNES, NES, Mega CD and Mega Drive collections have all found new owners in the past few weeks and the less we say about my precious PC Engine GT the better. I still have my beautiful skeletal Saturn and around 45 classic shmups to play on it, but the rest of my lifelong collection has been pushed to the back of my mind and no longer exists.

Many of you will no doubt think me mad; 'how could he sell all his games?' I hear you mutter. I can almost see the multiple heads shaking in disbelief. The fact is, though, I simply don't have the time that I once did to spend playing games. But don't get me wrong, Xbox Live is on every evening, not a day goes past when I'm not blasting away at *Battle Garegga* or *Twinkle Star Sprites*, and I'm currently plugging away at *Super Mario 64 DS*.

My life may have recently changed, but the Retro section will remain as fresh as ever. If anything, the loss of part of my childhood has spurred me on to find even greater classics for you all to enjoy…



Darran Jones, Retro Editor



▲ Old-school Mario, Link and others could find a new lease of life thanks to an N64 Player.

MORE N64 CLASSICS FOR THE GAMECUBE?

NINTENDO REVEALS THE POSSIBILITY OF AN N64 PLAYER

If you're the sort of person who can't bear to part with your precious N64 collection but needs more space under the TV, you could be in luck. It looks like Nintendo may be thinking of making an N64 Player, enabling you to play N64 titles through your GameCube.

A recent poll on Nintendo of America's website asked visitors if they would be interested in seeing such a device. Options for gamers to select ranged from 'very interested and would pay up to $59' to 'not interested at all'.

Nintendo hasn't confirmed that it's planning to release an N64 Player, but it's clearly a possibility. The success of the iQue in China shows that people are still interested in playing N64 games, but as it costs so little to pick up an actual Nintendo 64 these days, an N64 Player might be at a disadvantage.

There was a significant difference in price between the GBA and Game Boy Player when they first came out, and unless Nintendo delivers something exceptionally cheap, many may stick with their N64s.

Of course, if it was possible to enhance the visuals (in the way that PlayStation games are on the PS2) then an N64 Player would really catch get people's attention.

We'll be keeping an eye on Nintendo to see if development of



such a piece of kit goes ahead, but we'd rather see the iQue released over here – particularly if it means we get to play the likes of *Sin & Punishment* again.

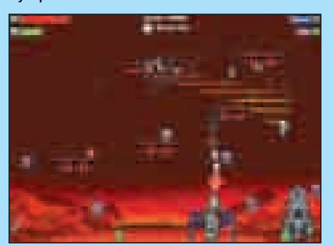
JETPAC RETURNS

LONG-DELAYED REMAKE ARRIVES AT LAST

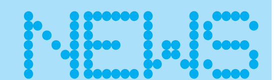
If you're a regular on the remake scene you're probably aware that Richard Jordan has been working on his *JetPac* update – *JetPak – Solar Crisis* – for a very long time.

Jordan originally began his remake on the Amiga, but it never saw the light of day. His second and third attempts also fell by the wayside, but now *JetPak – Solar Crisis* is finally available, and we're pleased to announce it's a beauty.

Coded using the Allegro games programming library, the game perfectly captures the spirit of the original *JetPac*, while throwing in plenty of pretty visuals as well. If you're a fan of the Eighties *JetPac*, or old-school games in general, we recommend you visit Retrospec and try it out yourself: http://retrospec.sgn.net/game-overview.php?link=jetpac1



GAMING NEWS



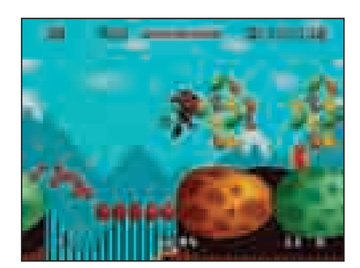
STOP THE MADNESS

NINJA OF THE NTH DIMENSION RETURNS

There's a popular misconception that we're sadly misguided and think that all retro titles are great. This, of course, is blatantly untrue, as we're all too aware that there are some horrific titles lurking in the industry's past. One such example is *Zool*, an incredibly naff mascot for Gremlin Graphics who appeared on way too many consoles.

However, Zoo Digital has recently announced that it plans to bring *Zool* to mobile technology, but has revealed little else.

Let's just hope it's not just the original game and is actually something new, otherwise we may never go near a mobile phone again.



MSX GAMES SET TO RETURN

CLASSIC GAMES TO APPEAR IN EUROPE

The MSX is one of the most highly regarded retro computers around and boasts a fantastic range of software. Sadly, it never proved very popular in the UK, so not many people are aware of how popular it was (and still is).

All of this could be about to change, though, as Dutch company Bazix is to re-release classic MSX titles for people with Windows PCs. Games will be available for download via emulation and Bazix is collaborating with both MSX Association (MSX copyright and trademark owners) and D4 Enterprise (managers of Japanese game licences) to ensure that everything is nice and legal. It's also hoped that previously unplayable Japanese titles will now be fully translated.

Admittedly, it's easy to get hold of many of these titles already (providing you know where to illegally look) but wouldn't it be nice to own these classic games legitimately?



Retro DIARY

As old-school gaming gets more popular, it's about time everyone knew about upcoming retro events…

JANUARY '05

Sonic Mega Collection Plus

Date: TBC **Publisher:** Sega **Price:** TBC

Already available on the GameCube, *Sonic Mega Collection Plus* will give Xbox and PlayStation2 owners even more hedgehog titles, making this a promising looking collection.

FEBRUARY '05

Phantasy Star Trilogy

Date: 1 Feb **Publisher:** Sega **Price:** £14

Sega's classic remakes continue, although we're not too sure why it decided to leave out *Phantasy Star III*. New visuals, soundtracks and added features should ensure that this compilation feels like a breath of fresh air when it's eventually released.

Retrovision

Date: 11-14 Feb **Location:** The George Hotel, Frome, Somerset
Price: £10-£25

Next year's Retrovision looks to be another four days of great classic gaming. Competitions will be held on the likes of the Dreamcast, Commodore 64 and the Vic 20. There'll be plenty of traders and stalls and you can guarantee that there'll be plenty of retro games to play. Who knows, you may even see Jeff Minter…

JULY '05

GCE UK

Date: 30-31 July **Location:** TBA **Price:** TBA

After the success of 2004's event, we've been told that another GCE is now a certainty. Little is known as to who will be opening the event, but it looks like GCE UK is keen to get hold of Dominik Diamond.

AUGUST '05

Classic Gaming Expo (CGE)

Date: TBA **Location:** TBA **Price:** TBA

Last year's event was attended by none other than Konami and Midway and proved to be a huge success. As the expo prepares to enter its eighth year, you can be sure that 2005's event will be even better.

SEPTEMBER '05

Jagfest '05

Date: TBA **Location:** TBA **Price:** TBA

Details are still sketchy at the moment, but we have been made aware that Jagfest UK will return in 2005. The event has been running for several years now and has slowly been gathering momentum. If you're a fan of Atari's ill-fated console, check it out.

If you know of, or are hosting, any retro events, please contact the Retro Editor at darranj@paragon.co.uk

GREAT GAME BOSSES

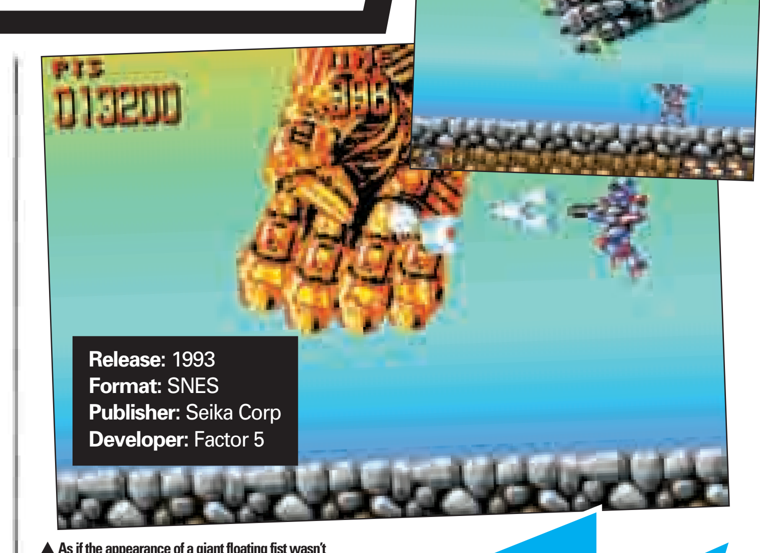
S•U•P•E•R T•U•R•R•I•C•A•N

With *Turrican* converting successfully to the 8- and 16-bit computers, hopes were high that the SNES version would be similarly accomplished. And these hopes were fulfilled as *Super Turrican* turned out to be every bit as good as the titles that had preceeded it. Need further proof? Then simply check out the first boss in all its Mode 7 glory.

After making your way through an incredibly frantic first level that saw you blasting everything from small insects to power-up pods, you found yourself resting your trigger finger and marvelling at the serenity around you. Sadly, this moment of peace was quickly interrupted by the arrival of a large metal gauntlet.

Bracing yourself for the battle ahead, your jaw dropped in amazement as the gauntlet expanded until it had taken up a quarter of the screen (good old Mode 7). Unperturbed by its sudden growth, you started blasting it to hell while looking for a way to defeat it.

Then without warning the metal-clad hand rotated through 90 degrees and smashed you into the ground. Caught off guard, you took a huge amount of damage and moved as far away from the crazed fist as possible. Before long, though, you had the gauntlet sussed, and with a few nifty moves (not to mention some judicious firepower) your metallic foe was soon nothing more than a bad memory.



Release: 1993
Format: SNES
Publisher: Seika Corp
Developer: Factor 5

▲ As if the appearance of a giant floating fist wasn't bad enough, it wants to kill you.

Great RETRO Gaming Moments

P•I•L•O•T W•I•N•G•S

Year: 1993
Format: SNES
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-House

Earning flight certificates may not sound like a great idea for a game, but when it's executed as well as Nintendo's *Pilot Wings* it's impossible to complain. Featuring astonishing Mode 7 visuals, *Pilot Wings* saw you flying various devices in order to secure your coveted certificates and become the ultimate pilot.

Whilst the first level consisted of nothing more than mastering the landing of a bi-plane and taking part in a little bit of sky diving, later levels got progressively trickier. Our favourite, though, has to be the wonderful serenity of level three. The previous stage saw you adding the Rocketbelt to your repertoire of flying contraptions, but nothing could prepare you for the all-out beauty of wheeling through the sky in your hang-glider.



▲ A spot of hang-gliding – the perfect antidote to today's drive-by-laden, whore-beating violence-fests.

Like the other tasks you had to complete, it should have been a simple task of guiding your glider to the desired landing point and moving onto the next level. As you soared through the air, though, you soon forgot the task at hand and just wanted to glide about to your heart's content. As the impressive Mode 7 landscape rotated lazily below you, your cares were forgotten as you peacefully flew around.

Inevitably, gravity beckoned and you were forced to start your descent. At the last moment, though, you were able to grab an air current and could once again take majestically to the air. Magic, sheer magic…

Rising Sun Retro

The advent of 16-bit consoles opened up a world of import gaming, and one incentive was the ability to get hold of games that would never appear outside Japan. With this in mind, we're taking a look at the import classics that never got released in the UK. This month it's the turn of Elevator Action Returns…

E•L•E•V•A•T•O•R A•C•T•I•O•N R•E•T•U•R•N•S

Release: 1997
Format: Saturn
Publisher: Taito
Developer: Ving

In 1983 Taito released the excellent *Elevator Action*, an arcade title that combined cute visuals and challenging gameplay to great effect. Considering its success, it seems strange that it took Taito 11 years to come up with a sequel and then a further three before it was ported to the Saturn. *Elevator Action Returns* was a stunning Saturn coin-up conversion that perfectly captured all the thrills of its arcade parent.

Unlike the original *Elevator Action*, which starred Agent 17, the sequel saw you choose from a selection of three spies: Jad the Taff, Edie Burret or Kart Bradfield. Whether you teamed up with a second player for gratuitous blasting, or preferred to go it alone, the aim was the same – work your way down to the bottom of a building and diffuse all the bombs along the way.

Red doors marked the location of each bomb, while data, points and food were hidden behind blue doors. Entering a room would see you leave the screen for a few moments in order to diffuse the bomb inside; this was also a handy way to avoid the bullets fired by the terrorists who occupied each apartment block.

While the on-screen characters were a little on the small size, they were all perfectly animated. Shoot an enemy in the chest and he'd slump to the ground leaving a bloodstain on the wall behind him, fire a rocket launcher at him and he'd run around engulfed in flames. This animation was enhanced by the amount of destruction in the game: lights could be shot out, elevators would crush unwary characters and enemies, and careful bomb-throwing could trigger explosions that blanketed entire floors.

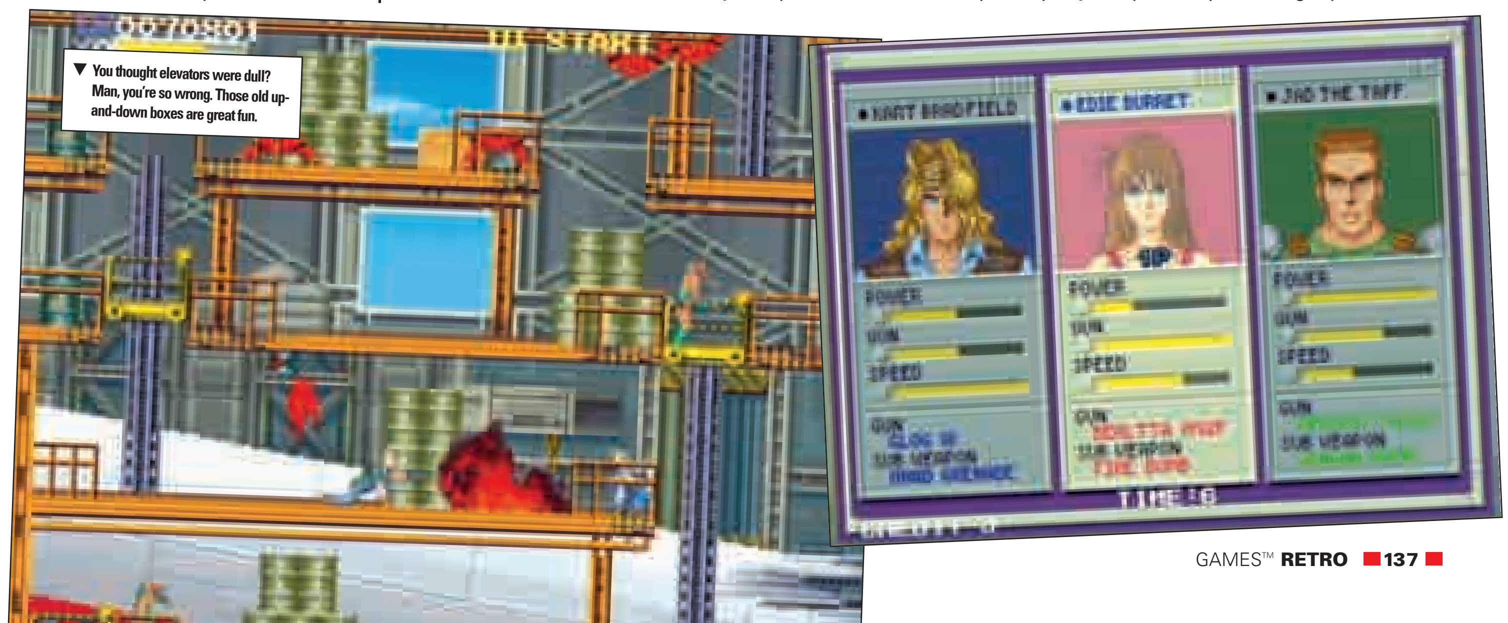
The action was accompanied by some suitably meaty spot effects and a great selection of jazz-style tunes that, bizarrely, fitted the carnage perfectly. Although it was far from an aesthetic masterpiece, *Elevator Action Returns* is a perfectly accomplished conversion and still holds up well today.

But perhaps the most enjoyable aspect of *Elevator Action Returns* was the gameplay. Controls were incredibly slick, and while the game was tough it was never unfair. The responsive controls meant you only had yourself to blame whenever a life was lost, and though the gameplay was simple it never became repetitive. As you got deeper into the game the level structure became more complex; later stages were almost maze-like, and as more enemies filled the screen you had your work cut out trying to find the quickest and safest route to each bomb.

As much as we enjoy *Elevator Action Returns*, it isn't a game for everyone. There are few extras and unless you enjoy continually beating your high scores you may wonder what all the fuss is about. But if you're after something a little different you should find Taito's sequel a very rewarding experience.

OUT WITH THE NEW, IN WITH THE OLD

Once you've completed *Elevator Action Returns* (no mean feat as you only have a certain amount of credits) you'll unlock the original arcade game. Despite looking rather ropey by today's standards and lacking some of the elements of its sequel, *Elevator Action* is still enjoyable stuff. Let's just hope it makes it onto Empire's recently announced Taito compilation.



▼ You thought elevators were dull? Man, you're so wrong. Those old up-and-down boxes are great fun.



Why Don't They Remake…

RAMPART

WHO'S THE REAL KING OF THE CASTLE?

Release: **1990**
Format: **Arcade (Various Home Systems)**
Publisher: **Atari**
Developer: **In-House**

When the first *Midway Arcade Treasures* was released last November, we were overjoyed to discover that Atari's *Rampart* was just one of the great games that had made it onto the excellent compilation. Often erroneously referred to as *Ramparts* (a *Rampage* clone that appeared on various 8-bit computers), *Rampart* is a wonderful puzzle/strategy title that's still insanely addictive after 14 years.

Although it featured a very enjoyable single-player game that saw you defending your castle's sturdy walls from cannonball-hurling opponents, it was the multiplayer game where *Rampart* really shone. Conquests were fought over land that was split between two or three players. Each player had several castles to protect, which was achieved by building walls around the strongholds. Once your fortress was secure, you then had ten seconds to place a set amount of cannons within your castle walls.

With the cannons in place, it was a simple matter of sending several volleys of cannonballs against your opponents to try to destroy as many of their fortifications as possible. After the smoke had cleared each player then had a further 20 seconds to rebuild their castle walls; fail to reconstruct your defences within the strict time limit and the game was over.

Every wall was made up of *Tetris*-style blocks and you wouldn't gain access to a new brick until the last was safely in place. All movement was carried out via a trackball (although a later two-player version used joysticks), which allowed for some very precise positioning. If you were able to rebuild your castle quickly enough, you could attempt to extend your walls to the other strongholds within the vicinity. Of course, your opponents were doing exactly the same thing, and while larger strongholds enabled you to place a greater number of cannons it also meant that they took longer to construct…

Playing *Rampart* was an exercise in both skill and judgement. It was all too easy to overstep your boundaries and greed would frequently cost you the game. Despite this, spinning the trackball for all you were worth and frantically trying to re-build your destroyed walls was incredibly addictive and it remains a multiplayer classic.

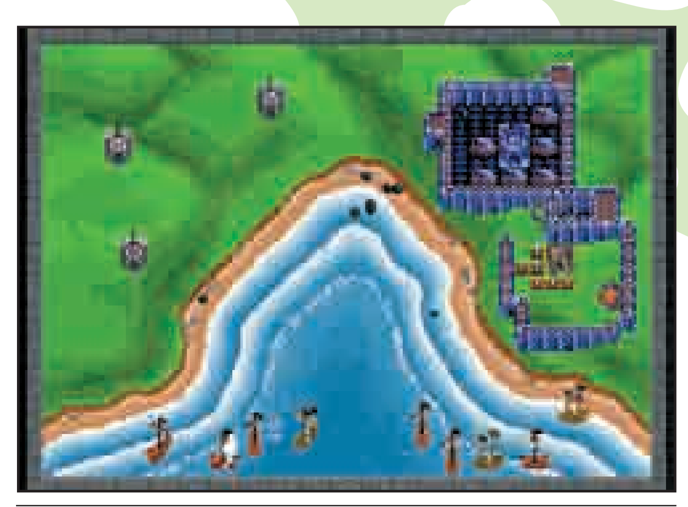
While *Rampart* would benefit greatly from analogue control, we could still see it working quite well on the ever-popular Game Boy Advance, though the arrival of Nintendo's DS creates a range of exciting possibilities. The top screen, for example, could display the traditional *Rampart* view and be navigated via the D-pad, while the second screen could let you zoom into the desired castle and rebuild its walls with the DS's stylus.

Failing that we'd be quite happy to see *Rampart* appear on the PS2 or Xbox with some sort of network play features. We're not interested in fancy graphics (after all, *Rampart* was never ground-breaking to look at) but the ability to challenge players online and maybe even increase the number of opponents to four could be an opportunity that's too good to miss.

ONE POPULAR TITLE

While it never achieved the dominating success of *Lemmings*, *Rampart* still appeared on a surprising amount of computers and consoles. The game's lack of flashy visuals was perhaps the main reason for its multiple conversions, although our favourites have to be the SNES and Atari Lynx iterations. The SNES used some jazzy Mode 7 trickery to great effect, while clever use of cut-scenes and a non-cluttered screen made playing *Rampart* on the Lynx a joy. Regardless of which version you may end up playing, *Rampart*'s brilliance is obvious to see.





▲ It might look like an RTS, but *Rampart* saw some frantic wall-building, cannon-firing and trackball-rolling.



▲ Blow your enemy's castle to bits and bombard his puny defences. All in the name of fun.



RAMPART (Arcade) Atari, 1990 – Original arcade flyer

SHOOTING STARS

JUMP INTO YOUR HIDEOUSLY TOOLED-UP SPACESHIP AND JOIN US AS WE LOOK AT THE FINEST SHOOT-'EM-UPS ON SEGA'S SATURN

Retro Feature

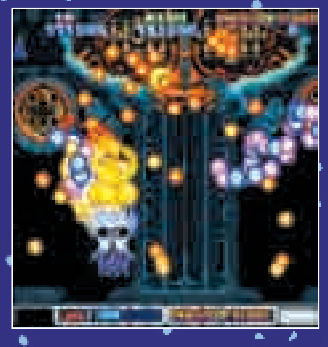
You have to feel sorry for Sega's Saturn. It's got something of a tarnished history and is often regarded as a failure by many of today's gamers. Sure, Sega's machine was difficult to program for, but developers like Team Andromeda and Capcom proved what it was capable of as long as it was in the right hands.

While the Saturn never really struck a chord with gamers in the west, over in Japan it was a different matter entirely, mostly because the Saturn was home to some of the greatest shooters to ever grace a home console. Although the PC Engine also proved to be a shooter's dream (check out the ridiculous prices that the Super CD-ROM title *Sapphire* currently goes for) it's the Saturn that most hardcore shmuppers regard as the superior system.

Thanks to Sega's ST-V Titan arcade board, titles like *Radiant Silvergun*, *Cotton Boomerang* and *Soukyugurentai* were incredibly easy to port and the Saturn's enhanced sprite capabilities soon made short work of the many other shmups that were successfully ported over to the console.

Over 50 shooters were released for Sega's machine and many now go for ridiculously high prices. Titles like *Radiant Silvergun* still sell north of the £100 mark, with the likes of *Hyper Duel*, *Sengoku Blade* and *Battle Garegga* following not too far behind. The budding collector needs to know just how much they can expect to pay for these sought-after titles, and, more importantly, if they're actually worth the money.

With this in mind, we take a look at some of the better (and more unusual) shooters available for the Saturn and find out just how good they really are…



BATSUGAN

Year: 1996
Developer: Toaplan
Rarity: 8/10
Estimated Price: £50-£70

Toaplan's last arcade shooter has been converted superbly to the Saturn, capturing all the madness and brilliance of the original game. It also laid down the groundwork for Cave's superb shooters such as *Donpachi* and *ESP Ra.De.* (Cave chief programmer, Tsuneki Ikeda worked on *Batsugan*) .

Although the visuals aren't as impressive as some of the other shooters here, they're perfectly defined and get better as the game progresses. Sound is likewise okay with the re-arranged soundtrack in Saturn mode sounding a lot stronger than its arcade parent.

What really makes *Batsugan* stand out is its hectic gameplay. Although the screen gets swamped with bullets it's relatively easy to stay in one piece thanks to your ship's tiny hitbox. As you defeat enemies you're given experience points; once you amass a certain amount your ship's firepower increases. Survive long enough and you'll be spewing out almost as much firepower as your enemies.

It's tricky to find and fetches a strong price on eBay, but it's worth it.

SOUKYUGURENTAI

Year: 1997
Developer: Raizing
Rarity: 5/10
Estimated Price: £30-£50

For those cynics who scoff at Electronic Arts' 'casual' credentials, you may be surprised to learn that *Soukyugurentai* and *Battle Garegga* were published by EA in Japan. EA certainly knew what it was doing, as both shmups are superb and worthy of any Saturn owner's collection.

It's *Soukyugurentai* (known as *Terra Diver* in US arcades) that we're interested in now, and if you're looking for a rock hard introduction to the world of Saturn shooters, you've come to the right place. Insanely difficult at times, *Soukyugurentai* has some of the greatest explosions ever seen and is complemented by some fantastic gameplay.

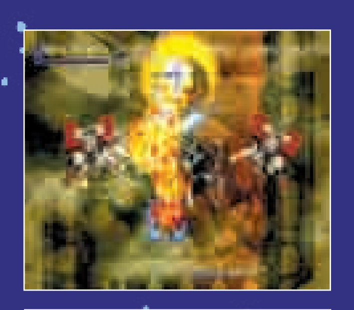
Originally released on Sega's ST-V Titan cartridge system, this was a vertically scrolling shooter on a horizontally oriented monitor. As in the excellent *Layer Section*, holding down the fire button released a web in front of your ship that would lock down on anything in front of you; release it and lasers homed in on your target. You needed all the help you could get, as this was one tough game (though never unfair).

Soukyugurentai is worth a few hours' bargain-hunting, but purists may want to find the version with the more obscure original cover art.



RADIANT SILVERGUN

Year: 1998
Developer: Treasure
Rarity: 7/10
Estimated Price: £80-£150



▲ Gorgeous, beautiful, stunning… what else could it be but *Radiant Silvergun*?

While it's not as rare as everyone would lead you to believe, there's no denying that this is one of the greatest shmups ever made – something that's reflected in its extortionate price tag.

Easily Treasure's defining moment, *Radiant Silvergun* combines jaw-dropping aesthetics with some of the most absorbing gameplay imaginable to create a shooting experience quite unlike any other. Rather than simply follow the path of other shooters (as it so lazily did with *Gradius V*), Treasure decided to break the mould and create something refreshingly different to everything else that was around.

Instead of collecting power-ups to increase your ship's effectiveness, you started off with seven powerful weapons. This intense weaponry was a necessity, though, as *Silvergun* pitted you against an insane amount of incredibly tough bosses. It was these huge metallic behemoths that really showed off Treasure's ingenuity, and if you've ever played the game many of them will still linger in your memory.

Available on eBay or import sites like www.videogameimports.com, *Radiant Silvergun* is as crucial as breathing – just don't pay over the odds for it.

BATTLE GAREGGA

Year: 1998
Developer: Raizing
Rarity: 7/10
Estimated Price: £60-£70

Many shmup fans claim *Battle Garegga* is the greatest Saturn shooter ever made. Although we don't agree with them, it's clear to see why it's such a highly revered game.

It may look a bit drab to begin with, but there's a hell of a lot of variety throughout the seven different levels and the enemy sprites are packed with an impressive amount of detail. Like a few other classic Saturn shooters, *Battle Garegga* is another title that was converted from Sega's ST-V Titan board, and the conversion is very impressive. It's also incredibly tough, so you may want to play in Tate mode in order to give yourself as much manoeuvring space as possible.

Featuring a complex scoring system and some great gameplay, *Battle Garegga* is the perfect title for the gamer who's looking for a challenge. Considering its deserved reputation you're unlikely to find it for under £60.



DODONPACHI

Year: 1997
Developer: Cave
Rarity: 8/10
Estimated Price: £35-£50

▲ The original *Donpachi* was good, but *DoDonpachi* takes it to the next level. And then some.

Though *Donpachi* is a more than worthy addition to your Saturn collection, Cave's sequel is even better and definitely worth shelling out for.

The combo scoring system that had proved so popular in *Donpachi* returns, but now it's greatly refined and allows you to rack up a massive amount of points once you know what you're doing. *DoDonpachi*'s visuals are incredibly crisp and even when there's a ridiculous amount of bullets on screen – and believe us, that happens a lot – it's always easy to work out where you are.

Bosses are predictably over the top and take masses of hits before they finally succumb to your firepower and everything is superbly helped along by the game's fantastic soundtrack.

Not content with giving you a practically faultless version of the arcade game, Cave has also thoughtfully provided a Score Attack mode and an all-new Saturn version with extra levels.

If you're looking for a challenging shmup at a low price then *DoDonpachi* is the game for you (providing you can find it, of course).

HYPER DUEL

Year: 1996
Developer: Technosoft
Rarity: 8/10
Estimated Price: £70-£100

Fans of Technosoft's wonderful *Thunder Force* will be more than happy with *Hyper Duel* as it has very similar in play mechanics and a distinct *Thunder Force* feel to it.

A core shooter at heart, *Hyper Duel*'s main draw is the ability to transform from a stylised ship into a flying mech. When in mech form your range of fire is greatly depleted but is much more powerful than your standard firepower. Although both Saturn *Macross* titles and *Assault Suit Leynos 2* featured the same play mechanics, Technosoft pulled it off here with much greater success.

As you progressed deeper into the game you could pick up smaller ships and mechs to increase your chances of survival. They may not have featured fantastic AI but the help was more than welcome and came in particularly useful when going up against the game's bosses.

Barely cropping up on eBay, a mint copy can now fetch up to £100. It's certainly a nice looking shooter and features some great tunes, but unless you're a huge fan of *Thunder Force*-style titles you may want to pick up one of the cheaper games we're covering instead.

THUNDER FORCE V

Year: 1997
Developer: Technosoft
Rarity: 7/10
Estimated Price: £30-£60

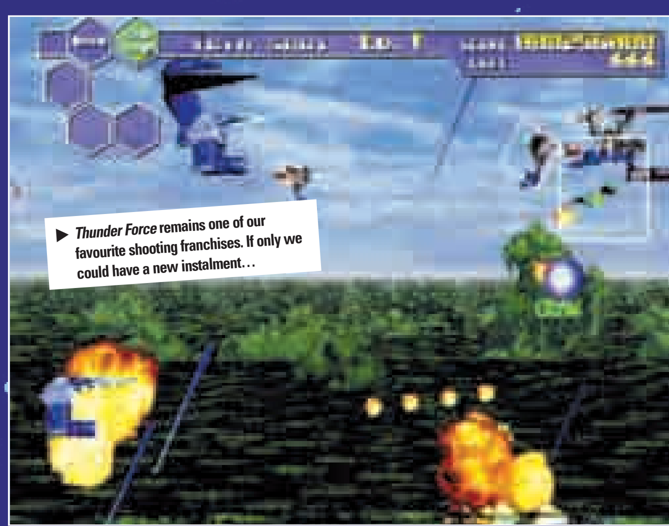
Thunder Force V was seen as a bit of a departure for Technosoft, as it combines 2D backgrounds with 3D enemies. Fortunately, the gameplay is as good as ever.

Despite the new graphical style (which, sadly, looks rather grainy on the Saturn) this fifth iteration features all the familiar *Thunder Force* mechanics and plays like a dream. Regular weapons like the Hunter and Wave all return and once you're fully powered up your craft is transformed into a lethal killing machine – perfect for taking out the huge end-of-level bosses.

The soundtrack is a typically raucous affair and just what you'd expect from the series, with Technosoft even remixing tunes from the original games to keep the fans happy. Visually, *Thunder Force V* is more than adequate and while there is slightly more slowdown than the PlayStation version, it isn't really that noticeable.

It's the games bosses that really show off the game engine, though, and all are as impressive to look at as they are tough to kill.

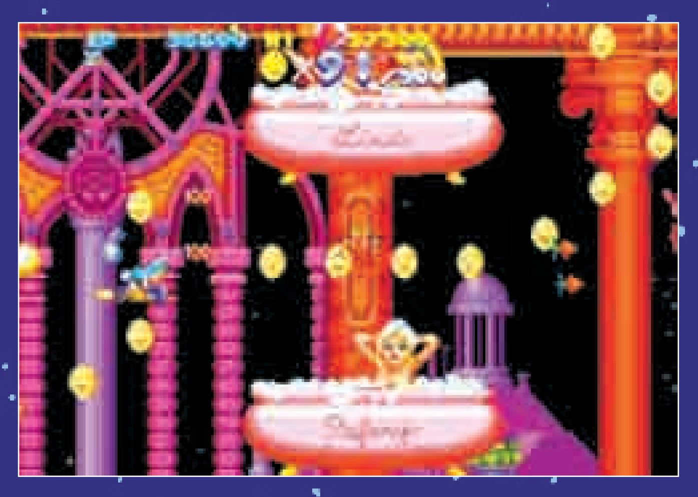
While it wasn't the sequel that series followers were hoping for, there's no denying that *Thunder Force V* is still a very solid game. Purists, however, may prefer the more complete PlayStation version.



▶ *Thunder Force* remains one of our favourite shooting franchises. If only we could have a new instalment…



▼ Ah, where could a shoot-'em-up be without the obligatory 'let's storm the alien base' level?



UNUSUAL SHOOTERS

WITH SO MANY GREAT SATURN SHMUPS COVERING SUCH A WIDE RANGE OF PLAYING STYLES, YOU'RE BOUND TO FIND SOMETHING A LITTLE OUT OF THE ORDINARY. WITH THIS IN MIND, HERE'S A SELECTION OF UNUSUAL SHOOTERS TO LOOK OUT FOR. THEY MAY NOT REPRESENT THE CREAM OF THE CROP, BUT IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR SOMETHING A LITTLE DIFFERENT THE FOLLOWING FIVE GAMES ARE THE PERFECT PLACE TO START...

THE GAME PARADISE!

Year: 1997
Developer: Jaleco
Rarity: 8/10
Estimated Price: £40-£70

If you thought the *Parodius* games were super cute then the sickly sweetness of *The Game Paradise!* (or *Game Tengoku* as it's also known) will have you reaching for a bucket.

From the moment you reach the player select screen and realise you can select a bomb-throwing pig, you know that reality isn't *The Game Paradise!*'s strong point. Fortunately, the wonderfully wacky visuals and hectic gameplay will soon grab you and you'll be facing off against some of the most ridiculous looking bosses ever to grace a shoot-'em-up.

Pleasantly bonkers and featuring some mad sound effects, *The Game Paradise!* is one of the cutest shooters we've ever played. If you're a fan of the *Parodius* games, it's definitely worth owning; other gamers may find this a little too spaced out.



GUARDIAN FORCE

Year: 1998
Developer: Success
Rarity: 4/10
Estimated Price: £25-£35

Unlike many of the other shooters here, *Guardian Force* places you in a sturdy tank. Thanks to the nifty control system (pressing the A and B buttons allows you to rotate your tank turret to the left and right) *Guardian Force* enables you to move and fire in completely different directions. This versatility is needed as even the first level takes some effort to get through, although hardcore players shouldn't have too much of a problem with it.

It's a bit garish in the visuals department and there are much better looking shooters available for the Saturn, but there's something about *Guardian Force* that we find really endearing. Not an essential purchase by any means, but if you want something a bit different, give it a try.

TWINKLE STAR SPRITES

Year: 1997
Developer: ADK
Rarity: 8/10
Estimated Price: £40-£70

It's not very often that two genres gel together as they have in *Twinkle Star Sprites*. This was one of the many Neo-Geo conversions that made its way to the Saturn and is a superb puzzle/shooter that's insanely addictive.

Taking control of the obligatory adorable sprite, *Twinkle Star Sprites* sees you shooting down wave upon wave of cute aliens. Once destroyed, their disembodied spirits head over to your opponent's side of the screen, who then has to dodge them or fire them back towards you. Needless to say, things get extremely hectic when you have chains of sprites constantly switching screens, and both your mind and trigger finger will be tested.

This game is becoming increasingly rare to pick up nowadays, but if you're looking for a fantastic multiplayer game, you won't be disappointed.



SHIPPU MAHOU DAISAKUSEN /KINGDOM GRAND PRIX

Year: 1996
Developer: Raizing
Rarity: 6/10
Estimated Price: £20-£40

Part racer, part shoot-'em-up, all good – that's the best way to sum up Raizing's quirky little shooter. Whereas *Mahou Daisakusen* was a more traditional shooter, the sequel is anything but and adds some tight racing to all the hectic shooting action. It might sound rather bizarre (and it is), but it works surprisingly well and can be picked up for a reasonable price.

Taking control of one of eight different racers the aim was to finish in first place while destroying as many enemies as possible. Though it might sound straightforward, the fact that your fire button also powered your speed added a whole new dimension to the gameplay. Sure you could race ahead and dodge the incoming enemies but your score would suffer, so a careful balance was required to get the best out of *Kingdom Grand Prix*'s unusual gameplay. Reasonably easy to find on eBay, *Kingdom Grand Prix* is perfect if you fancy a break from the shoot-'em-up norm.



CHOANIKI KYUKYOKU OTOKONOGYAKUSHU (SUPER BIG BROTHER)

Year: 1997
Developer: Nippon Computer System
Rarity: 9/10
Estimated Price: £35-£55

If you're after a complete oddity, why not check out this weird little number from the creators of *Gynoug*?

Sometimes we get a little upset when we play the latest Japanese title as we often feel that the narration is hiding something from us. In the case of *Choaniki*, though, we're prepared to make the exception. When a game features scantily clad musclemen, flying rocket penises and the collection of man protein, the less we know about it the better. *Sexy Parodius* may have been a touch risqué, but *Choaniki* is a different matter entirely. It's not exactly offensive, but it does sometimes cross the line of good taste (level one's boss features some sort of man/penis hybrid that follows you around the screen, for example).

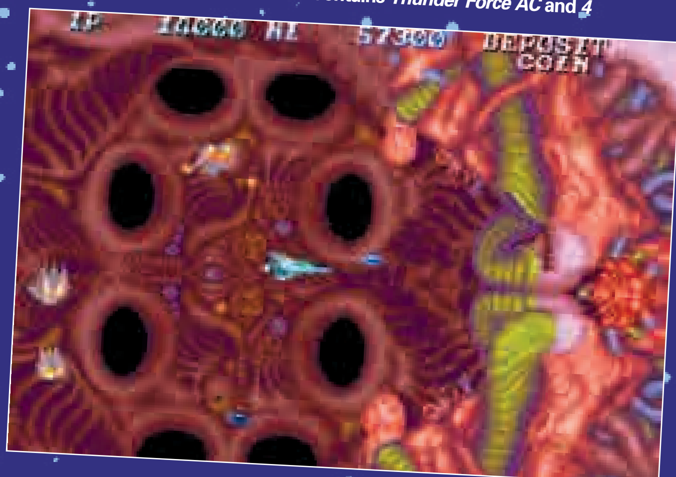
Still, as far as shooters go there's nothing quite like it on the Saturn and its rarity is starting to push the price up. Be warned, though, it's definitely not for the faint-hearted.



COMPILATION MADNESS

THE SATURN HAS A HUGE NUMBER OF SHOOTING COMPILATIONS, SO IF YOU'VE GOT ANY CASH LEFT OVER LOOK OUT FOR THE THESE GREAT PACKS

ARCADE GEARS: 3 WONDERS: Contains *Rooster, Chariot* and *Don't Push!*
ARCADE GEARS: IMAGE FIGHT AND X-MULTIPLY: Contains, um, *Image Fight* and *X-Multiply*
CAPCOM GENERATION 1: Contains *1942, 1943* and *1943 Kai*
CAPCOM GENERATION 3: Contains *Exed Eyes, Pirate Ship Higemaru, Son Son* and *Vulgus*
CAPCOM GENERATIONS 4: Contains *Mercs, Gun Smoke* and *Commando*
DETANA! TWINBEE – YAHOO DELUXE PACK: Contains *Twinbee* and *Detana!*
TWINBEE GOKUJYOU PARODIUS DA! DELUXE PACK: Contains *Parodius* and *Ultimate Parodius*
GRADIUS DELUXE: Contains *Gradius* and *Gradius 2 Gofer*
KONAMI ANTIQUES MSX COLLECTION ULTRA PACK: Contains numerous MSX arcade conversions including *Gradius, Super Cobra, TwinBee, Gradius 2, Time Pilot, Parodius* and *Salamander*
SALAMANDER DELUXE PACK PLUS: Contains *Salamander, Salamander 2* and *Life Force*
SONIC WINGS SPECIAL: Contains remixed versions of *Sonic Wings 1, 2* and *3*
THUNDER FORCE GOLD PACK 1: Contains *Thunder Force 2* and *3*
THUNDER FORCE GOLD PACK 2: Contains *Thunder Force AC* and *4*





Greatest RETRO Game Ever

CONTRA III: THE ALIEN WARS

MODE 7, MASSIVE BOSSES AND EXTREMELY MACHO MEN – IT'S A GUN-TOTING DREAM COME TRUE

Format: SNES
Release: 1992
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-house

Every now and then a game manages to get nearly everything right. *Contra III* is one such game. First appearing in British arcades in 1987, the original *Contra* (or *Gryzor*, as we knew it) was a rather enjoyable run-and-gun title that switched between traditional side-scrolling levels and some nifty 'into the screen' sections. A sequel appeared in 1988 and despite some solid conversions and spin-offs, everything went rather quiet.

When the series was eventually revitalised to appear on the SNES, Konami used every trick in the book to ensure that the third instalment of its *Contra* series would be a game to remember.

The likes of *Legend Of The Mystical Ninja* and *Super Castlevania IV* had already proved that Konami was perfectly in synch with the SNES's impressive graphical capabilities and *Contra III* pushed the boat out even further. Not content with delivering wonderfully detailed sprites and glorious backgrounds (check out Level 3's fantastic industrial backdrop) Konami also added plenty of Mode 7 trickery, which greatly enhanced the already fantastic gameplay.

Reprising the roles of Lance and Bill you found yourself in familiar gun-toting territory as you made your way through the first war-torn level. Cars exploded, wild dogs tried to sneak up on you and snipers fired at you from high platforms, while you tried to stay calm through the whole chaotic mess.



▲ Playing *Contra III* is like taking part in a bad Eighties action film. Excellent.

Power-ups fell from the sky at certain points and gave you access to cluster bombs, lasers and other cool weaponry; it was even possible to carry two weapons and switch between them when needed – something that was appreciated, as *Contra III* was a tough customer.

Enemies and bullets flew at you thick and fast, keeping your adrenaline pumping and heartbeat racing, and they never let up for a second, even when you had access to screen-destroying smart bombs. It might have been a fight to secure every inch of screen, but *Contra III*'s clever difficulty curve never cheated you and always left you hungry for more… and there was plenty to see in Konami's amazing game.

Once the huge plasma-spewing turtle at the end of the first level had been defeated, it was time to enjoy one of two jaw-dropping Mode 7 levels. Viewed from above, you could use the shoulder buttons to rotate the screen and had to destroy a set amount of enemy emplacements before coming face to face with yet another astounding Mode 7 boss. Indeed, the many impressive bosses were easily some of *Contra III*'s highlights and showed off both the system's capabilities and Konami's ingenuity. Few gamers would forget Level 3's huge skeleton that ripped its way through a cargo door, but every single boss and mini boss left its mark on you in some way.

Not content with delivering fantastic boss battles, Konami had also paid close attention to each stage's level design and the amount of variety packed into the game was immense. One minute you were running through an abandoned city, the next you were tearing across an alien-infested highway (complete with obligatory sci-fi music) on a souped-up jet bike. If variety is the spice of life, *Contra III* was a vindaloo.

It wasn't just the superb design that made the levels so unforgettable

UPDATE, SCHMUPDATE

We'll admit we were incredibly excited when we first heard that *Contra III* would be appearing on the Game Boy Advance. The lack of buttons was a bit of a worry, but we were more than confident that Konami would be able to achieve a fantastic port. How wrong we were…

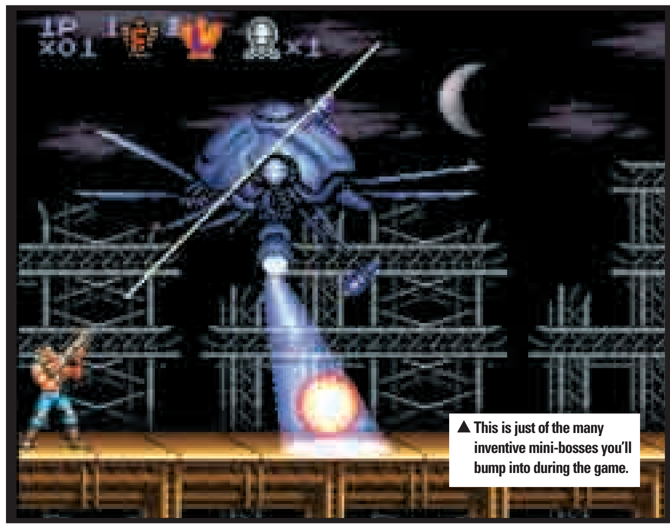
The music was vastly inferior to the superb anthems that played in the original SNES version and it was no longer possible to switch between weapons or use the handy smart bomb. It was also incredibly hard to dodge bullets on the GBA's small screen.

Perhaps the biggest omission, though, was taking away the two Mode 7 stages and replacing them with two levels from the Mega Drive outing. While the replacement levels were fine, it would have been nice to have the original version of the game.





▲ If there's another game where you fly around on a missile, we haven't seen it.



▲ This is just of the many inventive mini-bosses you'll bump into during the game.

either; each was filled with memorable events. Who could forget the amazing Mode 7 bomber that flew onto the screen on the first level and turned a peaceful city into a raging inferno? Or what about that part in stage four where you were clinging on to the underside of a missile and had to jump to numerous others as they sped through the sky?

We're not going to say that this is the greatest Konami title that's ever been made, but it's certainly a defining moment in the *Contra* series (a franchise that Konami admits borrowed heavily from the various *Alien* films).

Sure, the Mega Drive title *Contra: Hard Corps* may have been technically more accomplished (especially when you consider the hardware it was running on) and there's no denying that *Contra: Shattered Soldier* on the PlayStation2 looks very nice, but for us *Contra III* remains the daddy. So if you're feeling bored on a Sunday afternoon, or fancy a change from the latest 3D collect-'em-up, why not dig out *Contra III*? You'll be bloody glad you did.

ROBOTS ARE RUBBISH

No doubt unhappy at the thought of British schoolkids shooting scores of human sprites, Konami and Nintendo removed them from the Japanese game before it arrived in the UK, replacing them with lame robots. Not only that, it changed the title to *Super Probotector: Alien Rebels.*

Although UK NES gamers would have found nothing unusual with these poncey looking robots, the metal enemies spoilt the game's atmosphere and didn't look anywhere near as hard as the original sprites. Oh well…

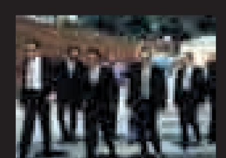
▼ A flying bike, some top sci-fi music and a bloody great gun that causes huge explosions. Sounds like the perfect night in to us. And the perfect night out, come to think of it…



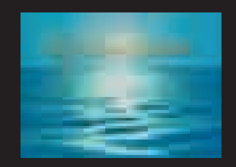
OTHER HIGHLIGHTS OF 1992



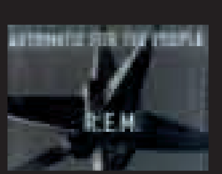
FASHION VICTIM:
Thanks to Kriss Kross, wearing your trousers halfway down your arse was extremely popular in 1992. If only those young tykes were still around now we'd give them wickedy wack.



AT THE MOVIES:
Quentin Tarantino burst onto the movie scene with the blistering *Reservoir Dogs* and re-invented the heist movie at the same time. Not bad for a self-confessed video-store geek…



ON THE BOX:
Want to know true horror? Then sit through *Eldorado* the next time it's on a cable channel. Wooden acting and naff storylines saw this over-hyped soap axed after just one year.



ON THE RADIO:
Fans of REM were treated to perhaps the group's greatest album to date, as proved by such classics as *Drive, Night Swimming* and *Try Not To Breathe*. Stipe and co. have lost it now, mind.



DEAR SANTA:
With the Gladiators proving so popular on ITV, it was perhaps inevitable that they'd get their own line of toy dolls. God knows who bought them, but there must have been a demand…

CLASH OF THE TITANS

T·H·E N·E·W Z·E·A·L·A·N·D S·T·O·R·Y

As gaming infiltrated the home market a new breed of gamer evolved. Dubbed the 'fanboy', he associated himself with a certain genre, machine or even developer or publisher, and then ridiculed all that opposed him. First recorded in playgrounds in the early Eighties, typical arguments revolved around who had the better machine, or which game looked best on which format. We aim to put a stop to years of squabbling by finding the definitive versions of some classic titles. This month it's the 8-bit computer versions of the excellent *New Zealand Story*.

ROUND 1: VISUALS

COMMODORE 64: Although the Tiki sprite looks a lot different from the rest of the in-game characters, there's little doubt the Commodore 64 is already off to a strong start. Lovely smooth scrolling, some excellent backgrounds and good use of colour all combine to create a very faithful conversion that does the C64 proud.

SPECTRUM: *The New Zealand Story* may show a distinct lack of colour on the humble Spectrum but the actual sprites look fantastic. All are instantly recognisable from the original arcade game and show an impressive amount of detail. It's just a shame all those backgrounds were taken out…

AMSTRAD: Although the Amstrad version most accurately captures the spirit of the original game, it suffers from some horrendous scrolling issues. All the sprites look superb and there's even an attempt to include the game's backgrounds, but sluggish scrolling keeps this from the top spot.

WINNER: C64
RUNNER UP: AMSTRAD

ROUND 2: AUDIO

COMMODORE 64: While it loops far too quickly there's no denying that the tune that plays throughout *The New Zealand Story* is wonderfully jaunty. It's not as impressive as some of the music we've heard on the C64, but it's a fairly accurate rendition of the arcade original.

SPECTRUM: Unsurprisingly, the 48K version contains nothing more than a few spot effects, and while they're nice and crisp they're still rather disappointing. Fortunately, the 128K version has the same bouncy tune as its peers and actually sounds pretty good. Hell, we actually prefer it to the C64 version.

AMSTRAD: Although it features the same short tune as the C64, the Amstrad composition is slightly easier on the ears. If anything, it's even jollier than its counterparts and perfectly matches the in-game visuals. Definitely the best version.

WINNER: AMSTRAD
RUNNER UP: SPECTRUM

ROUND 3: GAMEPLAY

COMMODORE 64: We have a clear winner here. The controls in the C64 version are very responsive regardless of whether you're using keys or a joystick, and the gameplay is as slick as the graphics. A great conversion of a fantastic arcade game.

SPECTRUM: Again, the Spectrum conversion features some rather nifty gameplay, and while it feels a little stodgier than the C64 outing, this is still a very good effort. If anything the lack of backgrounds and colour make it slightly easier to work out what's going on than in its peers, making the Spectrum an obvious second choice.

AMSTRAD: The Amstrad version might look and sound like the classic arcade game but it doesn't play like it. Controls are sluggish and unresponsive, while jumping feels spongy, and the odd scrolling often makes it impossible to avoid enemies.

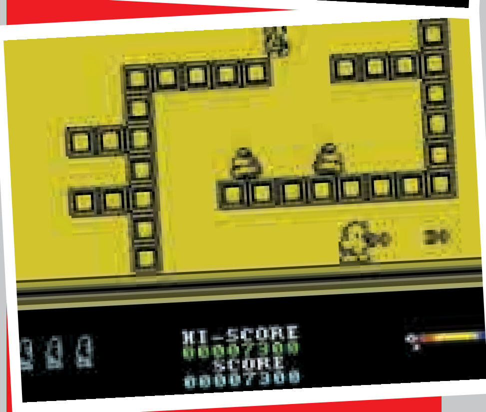
WINNER: C64
RUNNER UP: SPECTRUM

AND THE WINNER IS…

C64

Despite having a main character who looks like he's been cut and pasted from another game, the Commodore 64 version manages to capture the spirit of the original game most successfully. Great visuals, wonderfully precise controls and fantastic gameplay make the C64 game the one to own.







THE NEW ZEALAND STORY (Various Home Systems) Ocean, 1989 – UK Advertisement

1987 GTM MAILBOX

Wish You We

While you were playing Jet Set

Story: John Szczepaniak

When people think about the origins of gaming, they generally only think of two distinct regions: 'the east' and 'the west' – Japan, America and the UK. But while the modern gaming scene might be dominated by globalisation and giant corporations, dig a little deeper and you'll find that gaming has a much richer history than you realise; one that's at risk of being completely forgotten.

During the Eighties and Nineties, regions that were caught up in tense political or trade situations (such as South Africa, the Middle East and the USSR), surprisingly had blossoming gaming scenes complete with their own hackers, designers, traders and, of course, passionate gamers. And all this despite little or no official market support. This was an era when camels carrying goods across the desert and Chinese junks moored in black-market harbours were a reality, and where new hardware could be traded for a nice bottle of Zabruvka on the other side of the iron curtain.

Despite circumstances that seemingly went against them, these places had hidden and thriving games scenes, some that would even be the envy of other gamers. Where you will find teenagers, you will inevitably find gaming.

One interesting point to note is that due to the fact some of these countries were excluded from the world stage to some degree, piracy was present in all of them. It's perhaps unsurprising, since the extortionate pricing of games and the lack of official market support meant the average person would not have had access to such things otherwise.

Here's a selection of personal recollections from gamers who experienced gaming's formative years in ways that we might not have considered.



Greetings from South Africa!

John Szczepaniak, South Africa

The late Eighties and early Nineties was a great era to be a gamer in South Africa. Due to the sanctions, there was no obvious PAL games market, despite being a PAL television region. As a result of no official market support and the Chinese/Hong Kong immigrant population there was a mix of grey importers and low-priced far-east bootlegs. Every kid owned a Famicom bootleg system; it was so popular that Reggies, the South African equivalent of Toys R Us, made its own Famicom clone.

There were always hundreds of Famicom games, including some titles not available anywhere else. Notably we had several Famicom Disc System-only games that had been hacked and placed onto cartridges, such as *Super Mario Bros 2 (The Lost Levels)* and *Zelda*. Even more exciting was that US/UK-exclusive NES games were also converted to Famicom cartridges. We ended up getting games that had never even reached Japan, such as *Alien 3* and *Snake's Revenge*. This meant that despite having Japanese hardware, our RPGs could be in English.

Most game stores were filled with a kaleidoscope of cartridges, all emblazoned with their original Japanese box art. We were lucky enough to receive games in their original unedited formats as their creators had envisioned, unlike many poor European localisations, so games like *Ice Climber* had seals to be clubbed, not yetis.

When walking into your average games store asking to buy a Mega Drive, a common response from the owner would be: "You want American? You want Japanese?" Store shelves were lined with systems from each NTSC region, ready to run directly out of the box, supplemented with the correct TV cables and voltage adapters (with the exception of the SNES, where they tended to stock only the US model as it was cheaper and easier to mod in order to run Japanese carts).

While the average gamer was happy with the latest SNES and MD titles from Japan and the US, keen-eyed players went for the more pricey import Turbo Duo and Neo-Geo AES systems. I was in a lucky position, being friends with a guy from Hong Kong whose father ran an import store; as a result, I had access to some of the latest Duo and AES games.

With the arrival of the post-apartheid government and the re-opening of trade, corporations started to view us as another territory to be officially marketed. More importantly, another territory to control in order to put an end to any non-conventional gaming.

A relative who recently visited South Africa told me some sad news; many of the games stores I used to frequent had closed. The big companies were ensuring that gamers played only official products specifically for that region. You can't even find Famicom bootlegs easily now. An era of gaming had ended.

"WE WERE LUCKY ENOUGH TO GET GAMES IN THEIR ORIGINAL UNEDITED FORMS"

...re There...?

...Willy the rest of the world was waking up to gaming too

Alvaro Pacheco, Brazil

In Brazil, arcade gaming was much more popular than home gaming. Many people weren't even aware of many home titles, as they only knew what was available in the arcades. The arcade scene was so popular because games were so affordable to play (25 cents or so per game) compared to their console counterparts. In fact, the arcades were so popular that many kids – including my older brother – used to fail the school year after skipping class to play games like *The Simpsons*, *Toki*, *Combatribes*, *Final Fight* and, of course, *Street Fighter II*. Everywhere you went there were arcade machines, even in bread shops. There was an arcade on almost every street, sometimes more than one, with every variety of game you can imagine.

I've even seen many people get beaten up at arcades for trying to butt into someone else's game. People take that stuff seriously here – always aiming for a better run than before, or the elusive one-credit clear. We'd even wear 'thumb gloves' to stop getting all blistered up when we were playing.

As a kid I was lucky enough to live in a nice area, so my street had about 30 or so kids who all had their own videogame systems. Back in the Eighties and Nineties it was Sega's Master System that was most popular.

I still own *Mônica No Castelo Do Dragão*, which was a Brazil-only legal remake of *Wonder Boy In Monster Land* done by a Brazilian team of developers from a company called Tec Toy that had licensed the original game. It starred Mônica, who featured in our country's most popular comic book. It was the only legal remake of *Wonder Boy* as far as I know, but there were many unofficial hacks floating around, including a *Mega Man* version on the Master System.

Apart from Tec Toy, there were only a few other Brazilian game companies like Dynacom, Gradiente and CCE, though there are more today. Tec Toy did *Street Fighter II* for the Master System, but it was rubbish as you could only pick from about four characters. *Mortal Kombat* was even worse… Tec Toy was still releasing MS games up until the late Nineties, and Brazilian gamers were still enjoying Sega's 8-bit machine while the rest of the world was gripped by Saturn and PSone fever.

Despite the Master System's overwhelming popularity, there was still plenty of interest in the NES. It was possible to get hold of a 'Phantom System' that played American and Japanese games; in fact, some companies started releasing Nintendo games with a cartridge pin connector at either end for both Famicom and NES systems, though most people owned an import adaptor. Many gamers preferred legitimate Japanese imports for certain titles (which were somehow cheaper), but bootlegging was, and still is, huge in Brazil.

"MANY KIDS USED TO FAIL THE SCHOOL YEAR AFTER SKIPPING CLASS TO PLAY ARCADE GAMES"

Some people also still had Ataris in the early Nineties, and I've played *River Raid*, *Enduro*, *Spider-Man* and a few others on them. There's some excitement about certain Brazil-only Atari titles, but I've never seen them. As for really old stuff, on occasion there have even been ancient Odyssey machines for sale. Due to poor manufacturing and the Brazilian heat, the AC adaptors would get incredibly hot after a while and you'd need a fan just so they'd last longer. One of my friends went as far as putting them in the freezer so they could cool off.



Hello from Brazil!

On my street there were some kids with Super Nintendos and Mega Drives, but for 16-bit systems the SNES was all the rage. We used to cram over 12 kids into a bedroom to take turns playing whatever there was – mostly fighting games. The Mega Drive held its own with shooting games and a couple of popular titles, but was no match for the all-powerful SNES. We used to play games like *Legend Of Zelda: Link To The Past* (where my best friend used to keep a dictionary next to him), and other classics.

While *Mario* and *Sonic* were well-liked, the most popular games were shooters and fighters. With the arcade scene as huge as ever, we'd practise *Street Fighter* at home, then go show off in the arcades.

PC gaming when I was younger consisted of *Maniac Mansion*, *Prince Of Persia*, *California Games* and Brazilian games like *AV: Ases do Vôlei*. There were also puzzle games like *Sokoban* and I'm pretty sure *Scorched Earth* was also around back then. But that was pretty much all that was available. PC games weren't popular as not many people had PCs. The PC I used belonged to my mum's company, meaning I got to mess around on the 286 during the night.

Now the PS2 dominates the market, since you can't bootleg GameCube games and most Brazilians think the Xbox just plain sucks. For collectors there are general electronics stores that sell games as well as specialised gaming stores, otherwise today we use internet auction sites.

Mark Wong, Malaysia

While gaming did exist in Malaysia during the Eighties, it was not until the end of that decade that I first really experienced them. My family bought an IBM computer which was easy to get hold if you could afford it, but was very expensive back then.

I still remember when I was six and my dad introduced me to the new IBM, which had come pre-loaded with *Midnight Rescue*. It had English text, which was fine since I learnt English at school and many Malaysian-Chinese speak a combination of English and Cantonese. There were Cantonese games available that originated in places like Taiwan, China and Malaysia, but I couldn't play them due to the text.

Midnight Rescue was like a learning experience at that age, where you had to solve mysteries and work out puzzles, and it was something even my mother and father played. The three of us would take it in turns to play late into the night, sometimes until midnight.

Arcades were also very popular, but the biggest boom was with *Street Fighter*, especially at a highland resort just outside Kuala Lumpur where gamers would meet to set up mini-tournaments and challenge each other. Most teenagers there also enjoyed a special style of Malaysian tea (Teh Tarik) bought from Mamak stalls, where it was combined with milk and poured from a great height to froth it up, making it almost like cappuccino, so it was common to see arcade gamers celebrate winning a match or tournament by heading off to the nearby Mamak stall for a cup of this special tea, which is the Malaysian equivalent of going to the pub for a pint.

At that particular resort they had a very large area dedicated to all kinds of arcade games. Racing games were my favourite, and the whole family would play at the arcade centre; my mother, father and younger brother. Gaming was something for everyone to enjoy. When I was 12 I noticed a revolution in graphics and sound, as well as the beginning of the internet. This is when gaming really started to pick up. We would go to school and talk about the latest games we had, how to proceed to the next level, which games were better and we'd often share games.

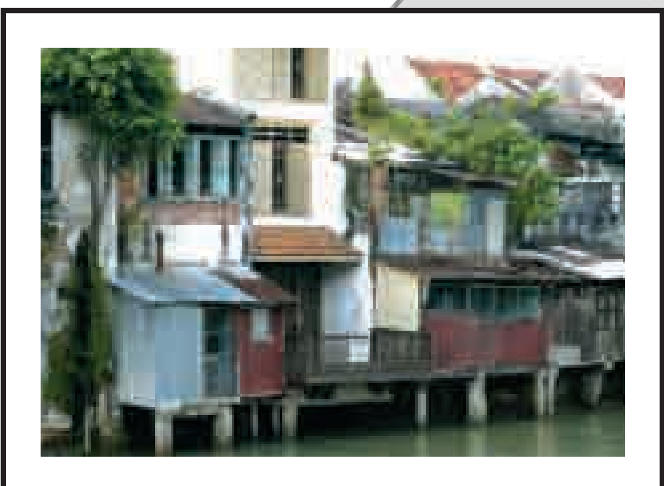
It was also the introduction of the PlayStation, whose original games were much more expensive than computer games, so piracy was quite common and widespread. While I never owned one, my cousins did; it was a Japanese system since most of our electronics came from Japan.

Secondary school meant multiplayer games, especially in cybercafés nearing the end of the Nineties. We challenged each other a lot and formed clans to enter competitions, with more and more gamers emerging. There is a lot of excitement in Malaysia surrounding the World Cyber Games tournament, and each year we send many players to compete, and each year we keep getting better. It was from humble beginnings on computer games like *Midnight Rescue* that sparked the flames leading to large Malaysian clan championships and entry into the WCG. Who would have thought we'd come so far?



▲ The World Cyber Games tournament has seen players from Malaysia prove they're among the best.

"ARCADES WERE POPULAR, BUT THE BIG BOOM CAME WITH STREET FIGHTER"



Hello from Malaysia!

Soliman AlWahid, Saudi Arabia

The first signs of the spread of videogames in the Gulf probably appeared some time around the early Eighties on the home computer scene in the era of the MSX, Commodore and Amiga. Games were the most popular software for those machines (rather than 'office' software) so computer importers felt there would be demand for the videogame consoles just starting to get popular in the US and Japan. Most famous of all consoles in the earliest era was the Atari 2600. To this day in Arabic slang, the word 'Atari' is synonymous with consoles.

The 2600 was the first console to gain popularity in the Gulf and thus started many on a lifelong love affair with videogaming. It created more demand for games, causing importers who were encouraged by the success of the 2600 to import several consoles like the Intellivision, but they weren't quite so popular.

Gaming was kept alive throughout the Eighties thanks to the MSX and the 2600. Even though they were basically the same thing, the NES never sold well and was hardly ever imported (unlike its Japanese equivalent, the Famicom, which sold like crazy and by the mid-Nineties was a household name).

The Famicom started the golden age of videogames in the Gulf. A torrent of bootlegs from Hong Kong and Malaysia, among other places, helped flood the market, cementing the machine's popularity. At one point you could even find Famicom games in grocery stores.

Despite the popularity of the SNES, it was Sega's Mega Drive that proved to be the more popular machine, and many more games were imported for it. More importantly, by 1995 the first Arabic magazine dedicated to gaming news was released and began reviewing import Jaguar, Mega Drive and SNES games (these days you can find dozens of Arabic publications dedicated to all things gaming-related).

> **"THE ATARI 2600 WAS THE MOST FAMOUS SYSTEM. TO THIS DAY IN ARABIC SLANG, 'ATARI' IS SYNONYMOUS WITH CONSOLES"**

Sales of the PlayStation and the Saturn only caught up with sales of cartridge-based consoles around 1996. The Neo-Geo CD and the Sega CD were released before them and were also relatively successful, but didn't sell as well as the next generation of CD-based consoles, possibly because they did not have a large bootleg market to popularise them. After around 1998, sales of pirate games actually exceeded those of legitimate games.

Bootlegging boomed with the PlayStation because CDs could be copied cheaply and locally, unlike cartridges, which had to be imported. You could walk into most videogame stores and ask what games they had and the dealer would produce several huge books, which on closer inspection turned out to be heavy-duty picture albums used as catalogues for several hundred photocopied PSX game covers.

But despite the ever-popular bootleg scene, official consoles and games were always available, and gamers bought those too.



Greetings from Saudi Arabia!



Hello from Iran!

Amir Asghari, Iran

Iran during the Eighties was like a war zone and kept under economic sanctions. If you were a gamer you had to either go to the bootleg market for your gaming fix, or 'grey import' stores such as those in the relatively safe capital, Tehran.

Either way, we had to take our chances when buying from electronics stores, running the risk of either being killed or finding that the store might have been reduced to rubble. Good gaming stock wasn't always easy to come by where I lived since trucks from other major cities could be hijacked by Iraqi aircraft.

When I was a small child, my father came home brandishing a brand new Japanese MSX console, including a complete boxed copy of the original *Metal Gear*. Little did I realise that this humble beginning would develop into a lifelong passion for all things *Metal Gear*-related.

Setting up the MSX was difficult at first. A neighbour who was a Commodore 64 whizz-kid had to help my father out. After much yelling, the machine did work properly, and my gaming life began.

Today, it's a very different situation. Japan is now one of the country's biggest trading partners, and where there's a way, there'll be gamers there to play





My earliest videogaming memories were formed in the many arcades that were found in most Russian amusement parks. The one I used to live near had titles like *Street Fighter* (which always had a big crowd around it) and *Double Dragon* in addition to marksmanship booths and video ninepins – a game similar to bowling, but with stackable pins. I didn't play many games, though, as the tokens cost a fortune and the machines tended to eat them far too quickly.

If the arcades proved too expensive, you could always try out the 'computer rooms' that were set up at summer camps and company resorts. Run by enthusiasts, you paid by the minute and had access to a variety of games and machines. Apple IIs, Atari 2600s, NESs and Spectrums were just a few of the machines available and games ranged from *Joust* to *Lode Runner*.

"NO-ONE HERE KNOWS THAT TETRIS WAS CREATED BY A RUSSIAN. BUT NO-ONE KNOWS WHAT TETRIS IS"





Hello from Russia!

In the early Nineties, my grandparents saved up some money and bought me a new console. It was a black, rectangular plastic box from Hong Kong with a NES chip inside. It was called Dandy, had a picture of Babar on the front and came with two games – *Power Blade 2* and *Jungle Book*. Actually, *Jungle Book* was a two-for-one cartridge, with a bad burn of *Robocop* as a sort of bonus.

There were a lot of 'omnibus' carts floating around, with prices going up based on how many games were on each cart and how advanced the graphics were. All the carts were obvious HK hack-jobs, mostly with the Chinese or Japanese text intact.

Perhaps the most interesting thing about gaming in Russia is that no-one there knows that *Tetris* was actually created by a Russian. Then again, almost no-one in Russia knows what *Tetris* actually is, period. If there were any other specifically Russian-developed console or computer games back then, I'd never heard of them. Games were things that came from China, and that was that.

There was also very little sense that they were advancing, or getting more popular, or anything to that effect. They were strictly a relatively obscure, imported children's toy. During my last visit some years ago,

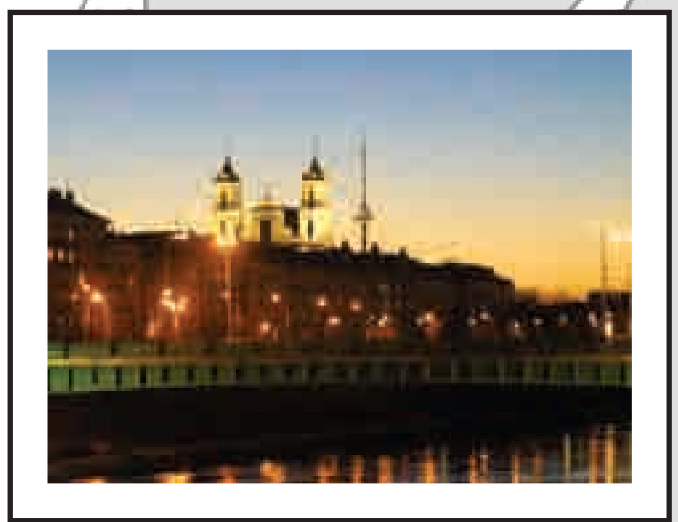
▼ Summer camps set up computer rooms to let gamers get to grips with technology.





all the neighbourhood kids seemed to spend time at a parlour that opened down the street where they paid by the minute to play Russian hacks of *Diablo*, *StarCraft* and *Crazy Taxi*.

It was still run by a hobbyist with horn-rimmed glasses and there were a lot of older teens and rich kids whose parents you didn't want to upset. Everything cool or new in Russia always seemed to get there via less than savoury channels, and videogames were hardly going to be an exception.



Greetings from Lithuania!

"AS LITHUANIAN LIFE TRANSFORMED, THOSE SEGA CONSOLES WERE REPLACED BY SONY'S PLAYSTATION"

Mantas Bilius, Lithuania

Lithuania was a part of the USSR until 1990, and was one of the first countries to gain independence. Gaming for us was virtually the same as in central Russia, but console games (I had a system called Zilithon) were almost all in English.

Later in my town they opened some games parlours. At first they were full of Sega consoles – *Sonic* was, of course, very popular and one of my personal favourites.

As time passed and Lithuanian life transformed all around me, they changed those Sega consoles into Sony PlayStations, complete with copies of *Red Alert* which also proved popular in post-Soviet Lithuania. Only a few years ago some PC cafes were opened, and they became packed in just few days.

As for me personally, I used to play or mostly watch other kids playing these Sega games and then the PlayStation. In the mid-Nineties at school they finally gained funding and built a computer room. So as a result, myself and some other guys would play *Quake II* on Fridays until midnight.

One final thing – I didn't actually see an original CD until I moved to Germany. All the CDs in Lithuania were English or Russian copies.

THE GREATEST RUSSIAN GAME...

...That The Russians Didn't Know About

Tetris **is synonymous with Nintendo's Game Boy but was actually the brainchild of a Russian, Alexey Pajitnov. Created in 1985 after Pajitnov was inspired by puzzle game pentominoes, the game prompted protracted legal wrangling over its publishing rights. It was first spotted in 1986 in Hungary by British publisher Robert Stein, who made the first move in the publishing war by selling the rights before they belonged to him. Contractual quibbles and obstinacy on all sides led to a three-year battle which finally saw Nintendo snap up the home console rights to the game. Pajitnov saw no money from the game's phenomenal success of the game, though in 1996 he set up The Tetris Company, which has provided him with some royalties.**





Share your views about old-school gaming

First Contact
If you're into retro gaming and you've got something to share with the world, why not write to us at: games™ Retro, Highbury Entertainment, Paragon House, St Peter's Road, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH1 2JS Or you can email: gamestm@paragon.co.uk

STICKS OF JOY

Dear games™
I've been playing around with emulators for a while now, but although some of these old/retro/classic arcade games are great the control usually isn't. I remember the old microswitched joysticks and the new joypads and sticks just don't seem to measure up when you're playing these classic games.

I've managed to find a couple of second-hand Amiga joysticks and was wondering if there's any way to convert them to a PC; maybe you could even run a small DIY article.
Steven

You're in luck, Steven, as we've found a device that should be more than suitable for your retro gaming needs. The PC Competitor Adaptor converts the analogue signals of your Amiga joysticks into digital signals that your PC can actually read. Head on over to http://amiga.emucamp.com /feat_pccomp.htm for more information.

SECOND THINGS FIRST

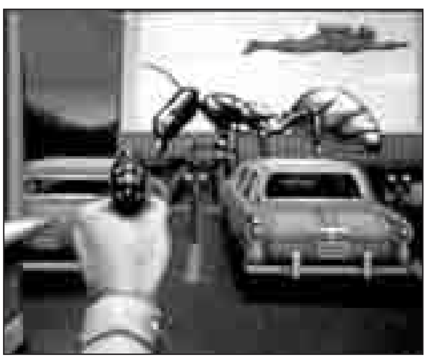
Dear games™
Congrats on making *Sonic The Hedgehog* your game of the month [issue 25]. I'm a huge *Sonic* fan and love that blue critter more than life itself. How come it's taken so long for you to feature him, though, and will you be covering *Sonic 2* any time soon?
Hannah Bell

Glad you liked the *Sonic* article. Funnily enough, you're not the only one to mention *Sonic 2*. While we're quite aware that *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* is the superior game, it only seemed fair to cover the original title first. We might get round to looking at it in depth in the future – watch this space.

ANT ATTACK

Dear games™
I was wondering if you will ever be covering *It Came From The Desert* for the Amiga, or *Buck Rogers* for the Sega Mega Drive? I spent a great many hours playing these classic games and would love to see them featured in the mag.
Gary Pike

We're not too sure about *Buck Rogers*, but Cinemaware released some classic titles, so we'll definitely be looking into some sort of feature in the future. As for *It Came From The Desert*, well, it might be appearing a lot sooner than you think…


Quick! Get the kettle on – we'll boil the bugger.

FORMATIVE YEARS

Dear games™
I was looking through the current Argos catalogue and I spotted these machines that include the authentic versions of classic games and I was wondering whether you've ever covered them in your magazine. I think they deserve a mention as it would be a fantastic way to introduce younger children to videogames
Pádraig

They're not something we've written about yet, but we will be covering them soon. There are several models on the market now, and, as you've pointed out, it's the perfect way to get kids into videogames – it makes a change from sitting them in front of the latest Disney film.

MISSING LINK

Dear games™
I loved your review of the *Minish Cap* but was quite surprised that there was nothing about Link in the retro section. He's appeared in loads of classic games and it's high time you gave us some sort of feature on him.
Dale Marsh

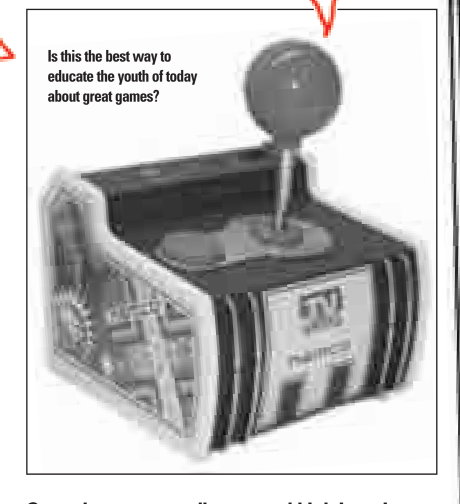
NOT SO SUPER STAR WARS?

Dear games™
I really enjoyed your recent feature about movie conversions and was wondering why you didn't mention the superb *Super Star Wars* on the SNES. I remember paying £70 for it when it first came out on import and spent all Christmas day playing it.
Barry White (no, not that one)

As good as *Super Star Wars* was, there are simply too many games based on George Lucas' franchise so we had to be really selective with which game we chose. As with most game-related queries, though, we've made a list of all the suggestions that have come in so we're sure to cover some of them in future issues. Perhaps even *Super Star Wars*.



This might have made the cut if George hadn't released so many games.



Is this the best way to educate the youth of today about great games?

Sorry, but we actually covered Link in quite a lot of detail back in issue 5 when we celebrated the release of *The Wind Waker*. That said, the *Zelda* games have had a huge influence on gaming (and they still do) so expect to see Link in one of his many incarnations in these pages again some day.

WHAT A HERO

Dear games™

I just want to say thanks for running the excellent feature about Frank Gasking and his Games That Weren't website [issue 25]. I was a huge fan of the Commodore 64 and always used to wonder what happened to the games that were previewed or reviewed and never actually appeared in the shops.

Thanks to your interview (and, more importantly, Frank's great work) I've now been able to fill in several missing blanks.

Roger Kean, Macclesfield

Glad you liked the article. People like Frank have been doing a great service for retro gamers over the years and it was a pleasure to be able to bring his work to the masses. Rest assured, we're constantly looking for other Unsung Heroes to feature in the section, so if you know of anyone who might be suitable then let us know.



STAR LETTER

OLD-TIME RELIGION

Dear games™

I was recently in my local games shop that sells a plethora of classic retro games. I was particularly pleased with my selection which included a near mint copy of *Blastcorps* for the N64 and headed to the counter.

Sadly, the assistant – who couldn't have been more than 20 years old – looked at my game, turned to his colleagues, and with hoots of derision said, "Eewww, a retro gamer".

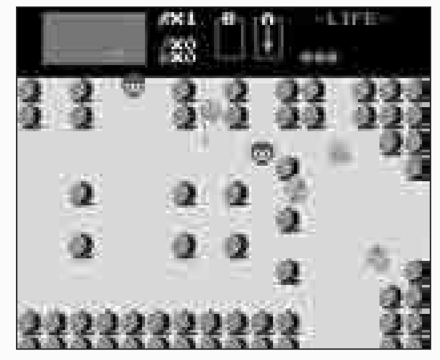
Imagine my complete dismay at this remark. Being 34, my reply was simple: "I was playing great videogames when you were still in nappies, sunshine!'

A word to the wise: Never, ever poke fun at a retro gamer. More often than not we are the people who were buying games such as *Pac-Man*, *Asteroids*, *Manic Miner*, *Knight Lore*, *Rescue On Fractalus*, *Mercenary*, *Sonic The Hedgehog* and *The Legend Of Zelda* and we helped shape the industry into what it is today. Without our support and cash, you younger gamers would not be playing the fantastic games you now have today. So please treat the retro gamer with respect.

I'm now going to put on my slippers and smoking jacket, light my pipe, and enjoy a session of *Jet Set Radio* on the Dreamcast which, incidentally, I bought for a fiver from the shop mentioned above.

Ian Jones

It's a blinkered attitude, but it's one we're noticing more and more. We'd recommend national service and a bloody haircut – that'll sort the whippersnappers out.



If dedicated gamers hadn't been playing the likes of *Zelda* all those years ago, gaming might have died and you'd have nothing. Think on…

SPECCY FANTASY

Dear games™

Seeing that you've recently devoted an entire section of retro to the PlayStation [issue 26], why don't you do something like this every month for all the other classic machines?

I'm a huge fan of the Spectrum and would love to see a whole section about it. You could look at the machine in more depth, look back at loads of classic games and maybe even interview people from the old mags like *Crash* and *Your Sinclair*. If you could make this fantasy come true, then I'll be very happy.

Adrian Timony

Fantasy? Steady on… The PlayStation feature was a one-off because of its current unique place in the market (and its tenth birthday). However, we are looking at how we address future 'classic machine' features and you could be seeing the Spectrum again in the not too distant future.







It might be easy to play retro games through emulation, but there's nothing quite like owning the original system – that musty smell of ancient electronics can never really be replicated with a PC. Of course, there's always a price to pay and unscrupulous dealers are out to make a quick buck, but you really don't have to pay through the nose if you look in the right places. Charity shops, car boot sales and eBay are all good places to start, but before you do, use our guide to see how much you should be paying…

3DO

Panasonic 3DO	£60
Goldstar 3DO	£50-60

ACORN COMPUTERS

BBC Micro	£50
Acorn Electron	£40

AMSTRAD

Amstrad CPC 464	£20
Amstrad CPC 664	£20-25
Amstrad CPC 6128	£25
Amstrad GX4000	£50



ATARI

Atari VCS 2600	£30 (wooden models tend to cost more)
Atari ST	£40 (with software)
Atari Lynx	£15
Atari Jaguar	£20-30

COMMODORE

Commodore Vic 20	£15-20
Commodore 64	£25-35 (varies according to model)
Commodore Amiga	£35-40 (varies according to model)
Commodore CDTV	£50-60
C64GS	£50 (becoming more sought-after)
Commodore CD32	£35



MISC

GCE Vectrex (General Consumer Electronics)	£20-250
MB Vectrex (Milton Bradley)	£175-200
JAMMA compatible cabinets	£100-350 (depending on model)
Supergun	£150-200 (varies according to model)

NEC

PC Engine	£70-80
Turbo Grafx-16	£50-60
Turbo Duo	£115-220
PC Engine GT	£100-200
Super Grafx	£200-300



NINTENDO

Game & Watch	£15-50 (depending on title)
Nintendo Entertainment System	£15-20
Game Boy/Game Boy Pocket	£10
Game Boy Color	£15
Super Nintendo	£20-25
Virtual Boy	£75-100
Nintendo 64	£20-25

SEGA

Master System	£20
Mega Drive	£20-25
Game Gear	£10-25
Mega CD	£40-60
Sega 32X	£30
Sega Nomad	£75-150
Saturn	£20-35
Dreamcast	£20-40

SINCLAIR

Sinclair ZX-81	£40
ZX Spectrum 48K	£40-50
ZX Spectrum +	£30
ZX Spectrum 128K	£40
ZX Spectrum +2	£35
ZX Spectrum +3	£40

SNK

Neo-Geo MVS Single Slot (Arcade system)	£70 (prices for multi-slots are higher)
Neo-Geo AES (home system)	£175-225
Neo-Geo CD	£125-175
Neo-Geo CDZ	£150-175
Neo-Geo Pocket Color	£30-50

Right, you've just picked yourself up a second-hand console and are looking for some classics to play on it. The only problem is, you're not too sure what to go for. Hopefully, we can help.

Every month we'll be printing the current prices for a range of classic games for a particular system. Of course, this is subject to change, so don't be surprised if you manage to get one for less (or, unfortunately, more). This month we're going to be taking a look at the N64.

Mario 64

Estimated Price: £5-£10
Developer: Nintendo
Considering *Mario 64* was bundled with the N64, you've probably already got this classic that's enjoying a revival on the DS. If you haven't picked it up yet, though, it can be found for under a tenner.



GoldenEye

Estimate Price: £5-£12
Developer: Rare
It may look a little dated now, but Rare's superb FPS is still great and has a fantastic multiplayer game. As with *Mario 64*, most N64 owners had this game, so you should be able to pick it up for very little.



Lylat Wars

Estimated Price: £8-£20
Developer: Nintendo
It's not always possible to find the original rumble pak that came with *Lylat Wars*, but if you're not too fussed about the missing peripheral you can get hold of Miyamoto's *Star Wars* epic for under £20.



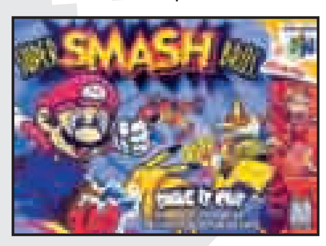
Perfect Dark

Estimated Price: £10-£25
Developer: Rare
As it appeared quite late in the N64's life, it's hard to get a mint copy of Joanna Dark's cracking first adventure. Ideally you'll be looking for an expansion pak as well, but the game is playable without it.



Super Smash Bros

Estimated Price: £10-£25
Developer: Hal Laboratories
Another classic that's becoming increasingly hard to track down now. Nevertheless, if you're looking for a great N64 fighter (like you really had a choice) *Super Smash Bros* is the perfect choice.



F-Zero X

Estimated Price: £5-£10
Developer: Nintendo
It might look a little rough around the edges, but *F-Zero X* is still an incredibly slick racer and a worthy N64 title. It's not too pricey, so if you want cheap thrills (not that kind), this is the obvious choice.



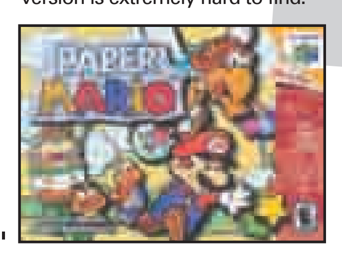
The Legend Of Zelda: The Ocarina Of Time

Estimated Price: £5-£12
Developer: Nintendo
Regarded by many as one of the greatest games ever made, *The Ocarina Of Time* is a true classic in every sense of the word and an essential addition to your N64 collection. It may be available on the GameCube, but we'll take the N64's controller any day.



Paper Mario

Estimated Price: £25-£50
Developer: Intelligent Systems
With *Paper Mario: The Thousand Year Door* in stores now, it's the perfect time to hunt down the original and play through it again. But do bear in mind that the PAL version is extremely hard to find.



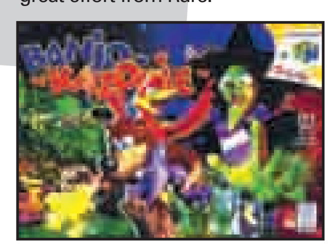
Sin & Punishment

Estimated Price: £35-£60
Developer: Treasure
Be warned, *Sin & Punishment* is a Japanese NTSC title, so unless you have the right machine or adaptor you won't be able to play it. With stunning visuals and some fantastic gameplay, this is worth the price.



Banjo Kazooie

Estimated Price: £8-£15
Developer: Rare
Some people think *Banjo Kazooie* is just as good as (or even better than) *Mario 64*. While we don't agree, there's no denying that it's a superb platformer and another great effort from Rare.



THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION

THIS MONTH'S ULTIMATE COLLECTOR IS BRIAN BAIRD, A 31-YEAR-OLD SOFTWARE ENGINEER FROM MOTHERWELL WHO NOW LIVES IN TEXAS. HE'S A SELF-CONFESSED SEGA ADDICT AND IS VERY PROUD OF HIS MARACAS…

Q) How long have you been collecting?
I've been into gaming for about 20 years now and programmed games for a living for about eight years. I started to really collect when I got into the industry and could finally afford to pay full price for my games. I still have my original C64, tapes and floppies, though.

Q) How did your interest in collecting start?
I've always had a nice pile of games through the years, but when I moved to the US about four years ago I cleared out pretty much everything I owned bar my Dreamcast. I foolishly sold a lot of hard-to-find Saturn games as well and ever since then I've been replacing and expanding on what I originally had.

Q) What's your most prized possession?
Most valuable is probably my Sega Saturn developer system disc or *Crazy Taxi* beta, but neither are my most prized, which are probably my signed copies of *Championship Manager 4* and *Project Gotham Racing*. They're not retro, but definitely treasured as they're by two of my favourite developers. I prize my copy of the Japanese release of *GTA2*, a game I actually worked on.

Q) How much is your collection worth?
On an online resource it says around $6,000. I've never really considered the cost, though, and I'm sure it's worth a lot less than I've spent on games over the years, but that really doesn't matter to me.

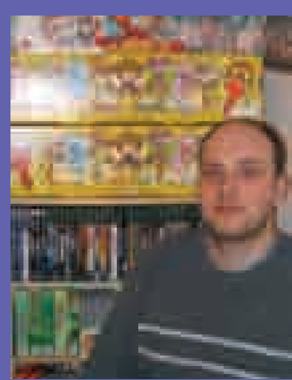
Q) What's the most highly desirable item that you haven't tracked down yet?
I don't really have a single 'holy grail' game that I want, instead I'm aiming to round off my Dreamcast collection, get a few more betas if possible, and then play them as much as I can. There are a lot of Japanese-only games I'd still like to get hold of for the Dreamcast and Saturn.

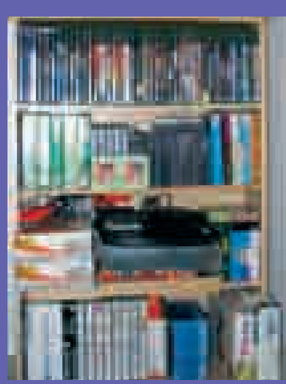
Q) What sources do you use and have you ever found a real bargain?
I pick up a fair amount from eBay and other online resources, but most of my games come from trading with other collectors. I think the best finds come that way, and it's great to build up friendships with like-minded gamers.

Q) What's the most money you've spent on a single item?
I'm pretty tight when it comes to spending cash on games as I'd rather trade, but my second set of *Samba De Amigo* maracas were probably the most expensive at about $120. I bought one set on launch, but needed a second as it's so much fun at parties. My Yaroze PlayStation cost nearly £400 and is my most expensive console.

Q) What does your partner think of your collection?
My wife really doesn't mind, except when it seems to take over every spare bedroom. Luckily for me, she knew she was marrying a gaming geek.


Have you got one of those? Have you? Eh?


One man, four maracas. Splendid.


It's not all Saturn, Saturn, Saturn, you know…

NEXT MONTH IN RETRO



We know it was promised two issues ago, but we really will be covering Sega's Sonic Mega Collection Plus next issue. Oh, and we finally get to chat to legendary game designer Don Priestly as well…

See you then!

ON SALE 27 JAN


eMag

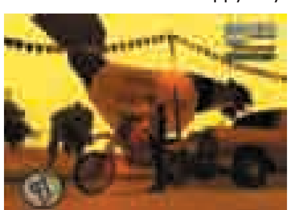
ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-



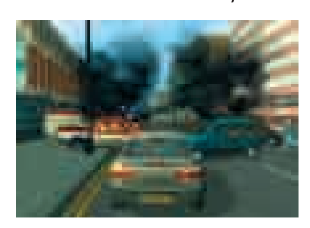
GTA: SAN ANDREAS

Okay, we'll admit it – at long last, we're finally 'feeling' *San Andreas*. Although having doubts about how good it would turn out was more than fair, the fact that Rockstar has delivered all it promised and more besides leaves us oh so happy. Yay.



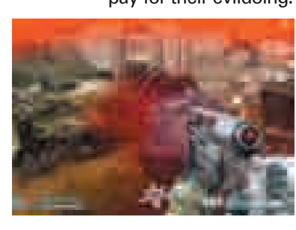
THE GETAWAY: BLACK MONDAY

On the other hand, Sony's gangster equivalent of the *GTA* series disappoints on so many levels it's hard to know where to begin. Needless to say, we'd suggest you don't partake in its cockney action.



KILLZONE

No, it's not a *Halo* beater – far from it. In fact, we'd actually like to know who started that rumour, just so we can take them outside and beat them with bamboo canes across the back of the knees. At least that way they'd pay for their evildoing.





PLAYSTATION2

Manufacturer Sony
UK Launch Date 24 November 2000
Media 4.75-inch DVD Disc
Current Price £104.99

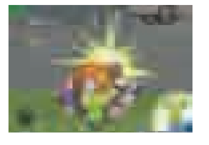
The oldest of the next-generation consoles, having had well over a year's head start over both the GameCube and Xbox. Thanks to Sony's reputation, though, it's still the most popular console around – a trend that will no doubt continue now that the remodelled, one-quarter-size PStwo is available.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PLAYSTATION2 GAMES

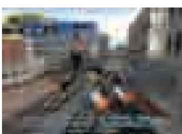
Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Amplitude	Sony	Harmonix	Music games have never needed as much skill as this
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	In-House	A fine example of adventuring; well worth the wait
Burnout 3: Takedown	EA Games	Criterion Studios	EA takes the arcade racing genre to new heights
Dark Chronicle	Sony	In-House	In-depth RPGs don't come much bigger than this
Devil May Cry	Capcom	In-House	The original is still the best by a long shot
Disgaea: Hour Of Darkness	Atlus	Nippon Ichi	Like your RPGs practically endless? Then this is for you
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North	Bigger, badder, better – a great *GTA* experience
Gregory Horror Show	Capcom	In-House	Bizarre, twisted and yet oh-so enjoyable
Hitman: Contracts	Eidos	Io Interactive	Silent but deadly – a real killer of a game
Ico	SCEE	In-House	Possibly the most beautiful game ever made
Katamari Damashii IMPORT	Namco	In-House	One of the quirkiest action puzzle games around
NBA Street 2	Electronic Arts	EA Sports Big	The daddy of basketball games – no contest
Prince Of Persia: Warrior Within	Ubisoft	In-House	The Prince returns again, darker than ever before
Pro Evolution Soccer 4	Konami	In-House	The only football game worth owning, period.
Rez	Sega	UGA	Deceptively simple – draws you in before you know it
Silent Hill 2	Konami	In-House	The high point of Konami's survival horror series
SSX 3	Electronic Arts	EA Sports BIG	The *Tony Hawk's* of the snowboarding world
Star Ocean: Till The End Of Time	Ubisoft	Square Enix	Square proves that there's life beyond *Final Fantasy*
Tony Hawk's Underground 2	Activision	Neversoft	Better? Again? How does Neversoft keep doing it?
Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution	Sega	In-House	By far the deepest 3D fighting game around today

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

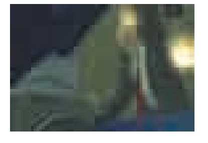
Katamari Damashii
Just because it's in English doesn't make it any more understandable. Loveable Japanese madness at its best.



Tony Hawk's Underground 2
A decent return to form for the series that made skateboarding cool… for everyone who can't do it.



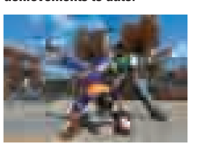
Hitman: Contracts
It might be a cunning rehash of the very first *Hitman* game, but that doesn't stop *Contracts* being immensely enjoyable.



Rez
As elegant and refined as any Sega title we've seen for a while – plus you can now pick it up for a bargain price.



NBA Street 2
Fast, furious basketball action that stands out as one of EA's better sporting achievements to date.









EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE…



XBOX

Manufacturer Microsoft
UK Launch Date
13 March 2002
Media
4.75-inch DVD Disc
Current Price £99.99

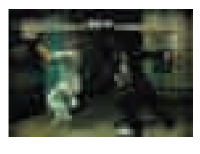
Despite a slow start, the Xbox has swiftly become one of the major players in today's console market. Suggestions that the machine is only 'a PC in a box' are founded, although the Xbox is far more accessible to gamers than most PCs. The 'special edition' Crystal console is now widely available from stores across the country.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE XBOX GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Burnout 3: Takedown	EA Games	Criterion Studios	The game that redefines the arcade racing genre
Chronicles Of Riddick: Butcher Bay	Vivendi Universal	Starbreeze Studios	A fine example of great gameplay and top-notch graphics
Def Jam: Fight For New York	Electronic Arts	Aki Corporation	Ultra-violent fighting has never looked so good
Deus Ex: Invisible War	Eidos	Ion Storm	Freestyle adventuring with a decent first-person twist
Fable	Microsoft	Big Blue Box	A special breed of RPG – well worth experiencing
Grand Theft Auto: Double Pack	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North	The best versions of *GTA III* and *Vice City*, without a doubt
Halo 2	Microsoft	Bungie	The Xbox's most popular game just got even better
Jet Set Radio Future	Sega	Smilebit	Cel-shading at its very best and a soundtrack to die for
Knights Of The Old Republic	Activision	BioWare	One of the best *Star Wars* games ever made
Ninja Gaiden	Microsoft	Tecmo	Damn tough, but a great example of style and gameplay
OutRun 2	Sega	Sumo Digital	Stunning reproduction of a great arcade game
Panzer Dragoon Orta	Sega	In-House	The classic series continues in well-presented style
Project Gotham Racing 2	Microsoft	Bizarre Creations	As comprehensive an online racer as you're ever likely to find
Project Zero	Microsoft	Tecmo	Scarier than anything else out there today
Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	Midway	In-House	An enjoyable and solid psychic blasting romp
Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow	Ubisoft	In-House	An essential update to the hugely popular Live game
Rallisport Challenge 2	Microsoft	Digital Illusions	Does everything you'd want from a rally game and more
Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	Ubisoft	In-House	Even better than the original, with a storming Live mode
Star Wars Battlefront	Activision	Pandemic Studios	A great game first, a great Star Wars game second
Thief: Deadly Shadows	Eidos	Ion Storm	*Splinter Cell* for the Middle Ages? Sounds good to us…

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

Def Jam: FFNY
Brutally violent, totally gangsta and altogether the 'bling-est' game that EA has ever released.



Project Zero
The sequel's out for the Xbox now, but we still reckon that the original *Project Zero* is the place to be for scares.



RS3: Black Arrow
It might not be getting our attention as much now that *Halo 2* is out, but it's still great to play over Xbox Live.



Chronicles Of Riddick
Small, but perfectly formed – Starbreeze's game does the unthinkable and offers some decent movie-based action.



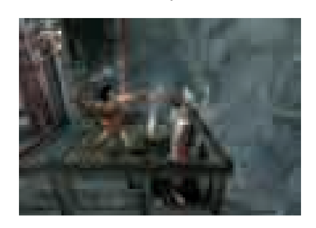
Fable
Hype aside, the game that Peter Molyneux built is still a great example of free-roaming RPG gameplay at its best.





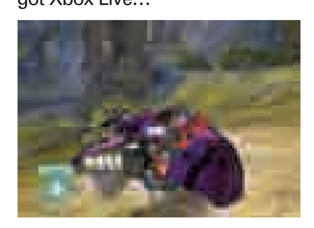

PRINCE OF PERSIA: WARRIOR WITHIN

And to think everyone was expecting Ubisoft's darker and more bloody sequel to be a shadow of its former self. Instead, *Warrior Within* excels in every way – even if that Godsmack music isn't to everyone's taste.



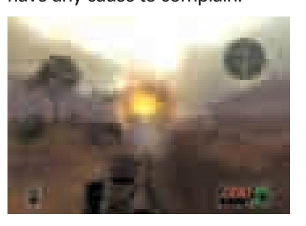
HALO 2

In contrast to *Metroid Prime 2*'s 'great single-player, shame about the multiplayer action', *Halo 2* swings the other way for us – the online multiplayer is amazing but the main campaign leaves us slightly cold. Good job we've all got Xbox Live…



GHOST RECON 2

Tom Clancy games always bring us out in goosebumps, so it's a bit of a shame that the latest *Ghost Recon* goes too far down the action road for its own good. If only Ubisoft had kept the original strategy stylings we might not have any cause to complain.



ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-



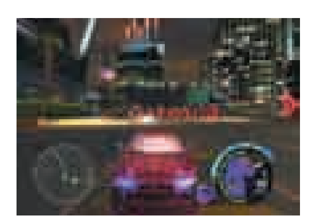
METROID PRIME 2

There's been much argument in the **games™** office because of *Echoes* – specifically, the highly disappointing multiplayer mode. If it wasn't for the amazing single-player game, some have suggested that it wouldn't be worth the nine we awarded it.



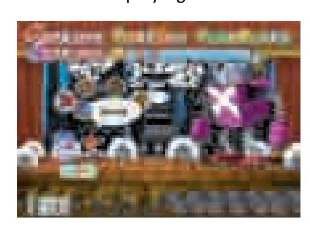
NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERGROUND 2

Could EA have shot itself in the foot any more? Having its own popular racer is fair enough, although we're pretty sure that releasing *Burnout 3* first (a far superior game in our eyes) was a bit of a mistake. Still, never mind.



PAPER MARIO: THE THOUSAND YEAR DOOR

Oh, the agony of choice – both *Paper Mario* and *Tales Of Symphonia* out in the same week, leaving GameCube owners with a huge decision over which RPG to play first. Good thing we're playing both at once.





GAMECUBE

Manufacturer Nintendo
UK Launch Date 3 May 2002
Media 3-inch Optical Disc
Current Price £79.99

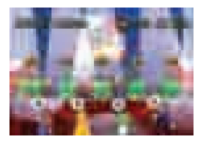
Though the GameCube seems destined to struggle, Nintendo's box of delights is still worth a look. While third-party support is dwindling, it's the first-party releases that really offer some quality gaming. Nintendo still makes some of the finest games ever, so missing out isn't really an option.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAMECUBE GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Animal Crossing	Nintendo	In-House	The only game to keep us playing for a full year
Eternal Darkness	Nintendo	Silicon Knights	Scary in a different sense – very intriguing
F-Zero GX	Nintendo	Amusement Vision	Sega does it again with a brilliant retro remake
Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life	Ubisoft	Natsume	Highly absorbing – the *Animal Crossing* of farming games
Ikaruga	Treasure	In-House	Hard as nails and incredibly addictive
Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour	Nintendo	Camelot	Golfing fun without the need for Tiger Woods
Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	Nintendo	In-House	Another great moment in gaming from Nintendo
Mario Party 5	Nintendo	In-House	Mini-game goodness, whether alone or with friends
Metroid Prime 2: Echoes	Nintendo	In-House	Another great 3D outing for our favourite female bounty hunter
Paper Mario: The Thousand Year Door	Nintendo	Intelligent Systems	Hugely entertaining and challenging at the same time
Pikmin 2	Nintendo	In-House	More flowery fun for those of a patient disposition
Resident Evil	Capcom	In-House	Still as scary as it was when it first came out
Soul Calibur II	Namco	In-House	The leader of the pack when it comes to swordplay
Super Mario Sunshine	Nintendo	In-House	Not perfect, but still a very fine Mario adventure
Super Monkey Ball 2	Sega	Amusement Vision	Monkeys and balls – what more could you want?
Tales Of Symphonia	Namco	In-House	An absolute beast of an RPG that will dominate your life
Viewtiful Joe	Capcom	In-House	Looks great, plays even better
Wario Ware: Mega Party Game$	Nintendo	In-House	A party game that'll have you rolling in the aisles
Zelda: Four Swords Adventures IMPORT	Nintendo	In-House	The perfect excuse to have your friends round all the time
Zelda: The Wind Waker	Nintendo	In-House	One of the many reasons to own a GameCube

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

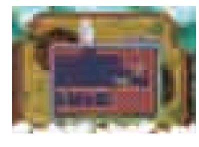
Mario Party 5
Easily one of the best games in the series, if only because it's as much fun alone as it is with friends.



Viewtiful Joe
The original version that GameCube owners swear by – especially since it's now cheaper than its PS2 cousin.



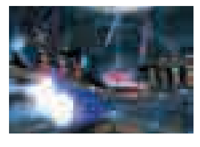
Zelda: Four Swords
Due out in Europe early next year, although we'd still recommend the Japanese version for the missing extras.



Super Monkey Ball 2
Rolling a monkey in a ball never ceases to be fun, so Sega's arcade puzzler is the ideal way to pass the time.



F-Zero GX
Still one of the fastest racing games we've played, bar perhaps *Burnout 3* – and even then it's a close call.









EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE…

GBA

Manufacturer Nintendo **UK Launch Date** 22 June 2001
Media Flash Cartridge **Current Price** £69.99



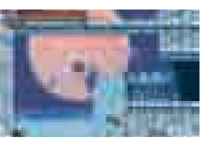
Ideal for gaming on the move, the GBA is a cheap and effective way of getting games to those who don't have time to sit down and play. The leaps in handheld technology mean that GBA games are now more accomplished and can even be compared favourably to their console-based cousins. The lovely SP model is available in a variety of colours.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAME BOY ADVANCE GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising	Nintendo	In-House
Astro Boy: Omega Factor IMPORT	Sega	Treasure
Boktai: The Sun Is In Your Hand	Konami	In-House
Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow	Konami	In-House
Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	Nintendo	Square Enix
Fire Emblem	Nintendo	In-House
Golden Sun: The Lost Age	Nintendo	Camelot
Harvest Moon: Friends Of Mineral Town	Ubisoft	Natsume
Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga	Nintendo	AlphaDream
Mario Golf: Advance Tour	Nintendo	Camelot
Mario Vs Donkey Kong	Nintendo	In-House
Metroid: Zero Mission	Nintendo	In-House
Pokémon Pinball: Ruby And Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House
Pokémon Ruby / Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House
Shining Force: Resurrection Of The Dark Dragon	THQ	Sega
Street Fighter Alpha 3	Ubisoft	Crawfish
Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island	Nintendo	In-House
Wario Ware Inc: Mega Microgame$	Nintendo	In-House
Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past/Four Swords	Nintendo	In-House
Legend Of Zelda: The Minish Cap	Nintendo	Capcom

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

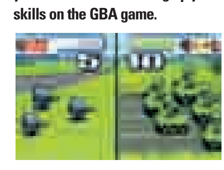
Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow
Can't find a cheap version of *Symphony Of The Night*? Don't worry – the GBA version is definitely a worthy replacement.



Mario Golf: Advance Tour
The GameCube version in handheld form – perfect for when you can't get to a proper golf course.



Advance Wars 2
Looking forward to the DS version as much as we are? Then you'd better start brushing up your skills on the GBA game.



PC

Manufacturer N/A **UK Launch Date** N/A
Media 4.75-inch CD/DVD Disc **Current Price** £variable



While primarily bought as a work platform, the PC has swiftly become the haven of the more 'mature' gamer. With its natural ability for online and LAN play, it's perfectly tailored for the FPS, strategy and MMORPG genres. However, it can cost a fortune to keep a PC up to date and running fast enough to support flashy graphics.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PC GAMES

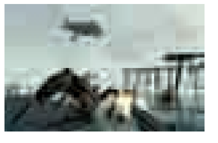
Title	Publisher	Developer
Battlefield Vietnam	EA	Digital Illusions
Call Of Duty	Activision	Infinity Ward
City Of Heroes	NCSoft	Cryptic Studios
Deus Ex	Eidos	Ion Storm
EverQuest II	Sony Online Entertainment	Ubisoft
Far Cry	Ubisoft	Crytek
Football Manager 2005	Sega	Sports Interactive
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North
Grim Fandango	LucasArts	In-House
Half-Life 2	Vivendi	Valve Software
Hidden & Dangerous 2	Gathering	Illusion
Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising	Novalogic	In-House
Pro Evolution Soccer 3	Konami	In-House
Rise Of Nations	Microsoft	Big Huge Games
Rome: Total War	Activision	Creative Assembly
Sam & Max Hit The Road	Activision	LucasArts
Sensible World Of Soccer	Sensible Software	Renegade
The Sims 2	EA	Maxis
Tron 2.0	Buena Vista	Monolith
Unreal Tournament 2004	Atari	Epic Games

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

Football Manager 2005
Sports Interactive can breathe a sigh of relief; turns out that you don't need a big-name franchise to make a decent game after all.



Half-Life 2
In a word: lovely. In several words: all the waiting has finally been worth it. Good job, Valve – you've lived up to the hype.



Tron 2.0
Despite being available on the Xbox now, we'd stick with the PC version, if only because it looks a whole lot prettier on a monitor.



PERIPHERALS

EACH CONSOLE HAS THOSE MUST-HAVE PERIPHERALS. CAN YOU KEEP YOUR HANDS OFF THEM?

WT20A1 LCD TV

Console: N/A
From: Sampo
Price: £699
Available: Now

Who needs a hulking great television when you can lay your hands on something as slimline and attractive as an LCD screen? PC users have been enjoying the benefits of high-definition flat screens for a while, but manufacturers are starting to come round to the idea of making such technology available to a more mainstream market at a fairly affordable price. This Sampo model, for instance, offers all the advantages of a PC monitor but with every additional input necessary for gamers and TV viewers. The unit supports RGB SCART, component, composite, S-Video and PC input, has a crystal-clear 20-inch screen, and has its own speakers, as well as featuring many advanced TV functions (including Picture-In-Picture display), which makes it ideal for those who need a screen that'll do everything.

UNIVERSAL RGT G1 LIGHTGUN

PLAYS ON PLASMA

Console: PS2/Xbox
From: E-Real Games
Price: £37.95
Available: Now

If you're interested in advanced visual equipment (LCDs, plasma screens and even projectors) then you're out of luck if you like lightgun games too as, until now, lightgun technology only works if you're using a traditional CRT television. That is, of course, unless you buy this rather odd looking lightgun from E-Real Games. It might look bizarre, but the length and height are all part of the technology. Instead of plugging straight into your console, the wireless gun works in conjunction with a camera that picks up the gun's movement. Once you've calibrated the gun (which only takes a couple of button presses), you can play any lightgun game on any console (it comes with twin connectors for PS2 and Xbox) on any TV with no fuss, and it's remarkably accurate as well. Although E-Real hopes to have it in the shops after Christmas, you can already buy it from the website at www.erealgames.com.

WILLIAMS F1 FORCE FEEDBACK WHEEL



Console: PlayStation2
From: Joytech
Price: £59.99
Available: Now



When you've seen one steering wheel, you've seen them all, right? Not quite. Most gamers might be happy with a bog-standard wheel that covers the basics, but more dedicated racing enthusiasts demand more – smooth movement, solid pedals and force feedback. There are already a couple of decent force feedback wheels on the market but with the release of the new Joytech Official Williams F1 Force Feedback Wheel, there really is now only one option when it comes to buying the best.

Sure, £60 does seem a lot of money for a luxury peripheral, but Joytech's wheel boasts enough quality to justify the price. All in black with a smoked fascia (which means that someone obviously listened to criticism of last year's multicoloured atrocity), the wheel is once again an exact millimetre-for-millimetre replica of the BMW FW23 racing wheel used by Juan Pablo Montoya, while the desk and leg clamps make it incredibly comfortable to use.

However, the differences to last year's model lie predominantly under the bonnet. Driven by three air-cooled motors, the wheel offers a customisable level of sensitivity and force feedback depending on your preference or the type of game you're playing. From smooth and resistant F1 stylings to the more demanding steering and violent crashes of *Burnout 3*, Joytech's wheel can handle it all; and if you play a game that doesn't support force feedback, the wheel reverts to the traditional dual vibration rather than refusing to work like some other models.

Although we're mightily impressed with the Williams F1 Force Feedback wheel, it does raise concerns over where Joytech can take the technology now. Short of giving you a real car shell, this is as good as you're going to get from a console racing experience.


eMag



NEXT MONTH IN GAMES™
Night vision at the ready, games™ sneaks through the Canadian wilderness and takes Ubisoft Montreal hostage, forcing it to confess all there is to know about the latest game in the Rainbow Six saga…
180 PAGES OF STEALTH-INDUCING SATISFACTION
ON SALE 27 JAN 04
RAINBOW SI



NEXT MONTH

MORE… PREVIEWS

Fingers crossed, next issue will have all the games you can look forward to in early 2005 with delights such as *Brothers In Arms*, *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory*, *Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath*, *Devil May Cry 3* and *The Settlers V* all landing on our doorstep.

MORE… REVIEWS

With our Nintendo DS now safe and sound in the **games™** cupboard, it's time to turn our attention to the PSP – all the launch titles, plus a solid verdict on whether Sony's machine has what it takes to steal Nintendo's thunder. Plus, more top reviews including *Knights Of The Old Republic II*, *Resident Evil 4*, *Shadow Of Rome*, and even more DS titles.

MORE… FEATURES

Good lord – it's only January and already we're jetting off around the world to see more developers about their new projects. Next month, **games™** heads to San Francisco to discuss top-secret FPS projects with Atari, sits down with the heads of Texas-based Gearbox Software to find out just what motivates them, and finally convinces Digital Extremes (once of *Unreal Tournament*, now *Pariah*) to spill the beans on why it has decided to go out on its own. The new year starts here…

Please note: Due to circumstances beyond even our control, we can't guarantee that the next issue will actually contain all these things. But it will definitely have *something* in it. Probably words. And some pictures.

CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF games™

Enough of what we think – this is where you get to show off your rapier wit to praise, criticise or mock the games industry

I WAS APPALLED to read reports on a number of forums about the fact that some people may have a problem playing *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*. The reason why? Because the lead character is black. One forum suggested that the game "won't sell because there's a ni**er as the star" and another comment said "at least for the PC version you can change the skin colour of the character and go around shooting a whole load of ni**ers." After the last comment, I hope Rockstar doesn't release a PC version that will allow racists to modify the lead character and act out their ethnic cleansing fantasies.

However, this furore has made me think – why do some people have a problem with black people in games? In the past few years only *Shadowman* (and its sequel) and *Urban Chaos* spring to mind as games where gamers controlled a black person. And during the golden era of gaming in the Eighties we could count Daley Thompson and Frank Bruno as ethnic minorities with prominent roles in videogames.

With racism and prejudice still prevalent in society there needs to be a change of attitudes by game producers to make sure everyone in society is fairly represented. Although many may argue *San Andreas* panders to a stereotype of the black male, at least it heralds a step forward to play a game from the perspective of an African-American, even with its clichéd hip-hop sensibilities. As a black man and long-time gamer myself, I have no problem playing games from the viewpoint of a woman, a blue hedgehog or indeed a fat Italian plumber. It's just a shame the rest of society doesn't hold my view.

Nick Ellis

games™: As we've seen on the football terraces at home and abroad in the last few months, it would appear that there is still a lot of work to be done in the battle against racism, at least in some quarters. However, we'd argue that the

LETTER OF THE MONTH

IS IT JUST me or are most of the letters in **games™** really depressing? People complain about sequels, Nintendo, casual gamers, the death of originality…. Does anyone step back and look at the big picture? Just look across the shelves in your local game shop and count how many games you really want to play. There's got to be quite a few, right? Are many of them sequels? Probably, but with *San Andreas*, *Half-Life 2*, *Halo 2* and *Metroid Prime 2* staring back at you it's hard to complain.

You want originality? Go buy *Viewtiful Joe*, *Ico*, *Pikmin* or *Animal Crossing*. If that's not good enough, how about the fact that consoles are the cheapest they've ever been, that the quality of most major titles is outstandingly high and gaming is now a part of mainstream culture? What is wrong with you people?

The next time you want to rant incessantly, pick up a pad and try to remember why you love gaming so much.

Paramjit Nahar

games™: You're right, of course, there's a lot to be thankful for. And now you can be even more thankful for some vouchers.



If you'd like to line your pockets with £100 of Gamestation vouchers then send us a games-related letter crammed with sparkling wit and pertinent points. Extra marks will be awarded for neat handwriting. Marks will be deducted for moaning about Nintendo.

Making Contact

There are many wonderful ways to get in touch with games™. The traditional postal method is perfectly acceptable using the address below:

games™, Highbury Entertainment, Paragon House, St Peter's Road, Bournemouth, BH1 2JS

However, there are quicker ways to reach us thanks to the technological marvel that is the internet. Email us at this address: **gamestm@paragon.co.uk**

Alternatively, why not get yourself on our dedicated forum?

Step One:
Get yourself online. It's fairly simple, so we're sure you'll think of something.

Step Two:
Type the following into the browser window: **www.gamestm.co.uk**
You will arrive at the **games™** website. Nice, isn't it? Click on the 'forum' icon near the top of the page. If you're a first-time visitor to the forum you'll have to register before you can post. Just click 'register', fill in a few details (such as a username and password) and you're away.

Step Three:
Ha! There is no step three. It's that simple. Just choose which thread looks most interesting then post your deepest, darkest thoughts (preferably concerning gaming) in there. There's even a dedicated letters thread where you can post anything you'd like to see on these pages.

games™ reserves the right to edit letters for space and/or clarity. The views expressed in letters on these pages are those of the correspondents and not **games™**. If you want a healthy debate, we'll see you on the forum…



SMS TEXT

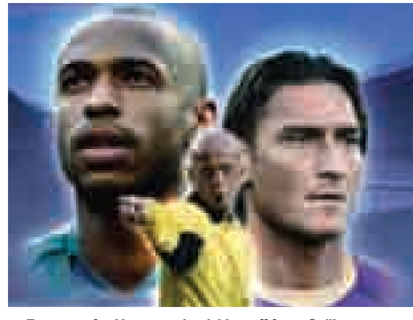
We've got an exclusive SMS text service sponsored by Orange. Simply text us your question or comment on

07970 043498

"ALTHOUGH MANY MAY ARGUE THAT **SAN ANDREAS PANDERS TO A STEREOTYPE** OF THE BLACK MALE, AT LEAST IT HERALDS A **STEP FORWARD** TO PLAY A GAME FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF AN AFRICAN-AMERICAN, EVEN WITH ITS **CLICHÉD HIP-HOP SENSIBILITIES**"



Ethnic minority role model? We just know he's well 'ard.



Exposure for Henry, and a ticking off from Collina.

development community is not one of them. If it were the case, Thierry Henry would not be the face of *Pro Evo 4*, Tiger Woods would not have his own golf game, Vin Diesel would not have his likeness in *Escape From Butcher Bay* – we're not even certain of Master Chief's ethnic background, are we? However, the idiots who post such offensive comments on the internet should not be tolerated, and it is they that should be attacked, not the development community.

PEOPLE OFTEN COMPARE the games industry to the music and film industries. But gaming differs significantly from these two because unlike music and film, gaming doesn't have a credible underground scene. In music and film you have chart hits and blockbusters, but there is also a quality underground scene, with more experimental and often more intelligent films or bands. This underground scene is often supported and funded by more successful blockbusters – film studios will happily accept a drop in profits for a smaller film in return for the greater prestige. They have *Spider-Man 2*, but they also have *Eternal Sunshine Of The Spotless Mind*. They have Busted, but they also have the Flaming Lips.

We don't have this in gaming. In its place we have fanboyism and snobbish 'otaku'-type behaviour. This geeky snobbishness replaces the intelligent underground to the detriment of gaming as a whole because this form of underground has no critical merit. Newsflash – *.hack* is *not* a better game than *San Andreas*. Before people complain, there *are* many great Japanese games, and some of them *are* obscure, but Japanese + obscure *does not* necessarily = great.

Fanboyism is a similar thing, albeit with the irrational allegiance being to a company rather than Japan. Again, blind allegiance and a stance completely lacking in critical acumen. Witness the Sega fanboy's fierce defence of *Sonic Heroes* on forums, and Nintendo zealots proclaiming the DS to be the best ever handheld mere hours after its announcement.

So what does this do to gaming? Well, it stops intelligent games being made. A developer can try to ask a publisher for the

CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF games™

Enough of what we think, this is where you lot get to show off your rapier wit to praise, criticise or mock the games industry

Text Life

U were harsh 2 the guy who askd about halo on the PS2 last month. If u had askd 10 years ago about Sonic appearing on a Nintendo, u would have laughed then too.
games™: You can hardly blame us for assuming that readers of games™ are a little more discerning then the reader of the average videogames magazine, can you?

Hey! Had to let u know, just spotted a copy of issue 13 on top of the tv on 'the house of trouser' in neighbours! u truly are a global fount of gaming goodness!
games™: Fame at last. 'House of trouser'? Whatever happened to Charlene and Scott?

love "games tm" what happened to family tree?can u do a side shooter up one please…
games™: The Family Trees have been dropped for a while but we've already covered side-scrolling shooters a few issues back.

Is it me or has bungie gone all anti-sniping in halo2? Not in the sense of camping but where's all the killing ground gone? So many damn obstacles! Why bungie why?!
games™: It's all about the fast-paced action as it's the only exercise some Americans get.

Halo2 only a 9 is an insult to people who know or care about games. You keep playing half-life i'll live in the now!
games™: Sorry about that, Mr Gates.

Keith,stoners don't play betta stoned,they playworse.If u'd done ne kinda research u mighta avoided lookinlike an idiot.AS it is, ur prob just crap at games.
games™: You'd be surprised at the number of stoned people we play against who are actually very good. Or it could be us being rubbish.

Issue 26 page 137. one of the most deeply rewarding games i'll ever what? doh!
games™: You see, they even made mistakes in olden times. So any of *our* mistakes are authentically retro. Obviously.

right to make a 'prestige' title, one that tries something new, but they tend not to get made. The suits who decide what gets made are often not gamers. They don't play games so they have no idea what constitutes a quality game.

If they tried to find out, they would be bombarded with crazy suggestions as to what a prestige game would be – "*Mario Kart: DD!!*" the Nintendo fanboys might shout. "What, some franchise update with cartoon characters in little karts?" Mr Suit would think. "Begin work on Generic Third-Person Licence-led Shooter 7!" Besides, it's always the blockbusters that get all the high review scores and accolades. So with no frame of reference as to what constitutes videogame art, the videogame industry remains a business rather than a creative medium.

There's another effect too, equally as serious if not more so: the way all this affects the public perception of videogames. Games are still seen by the general public as geeky, or for kids. Until gamers stop acting like geeky kids, or at least until the geeky kids stop drowning everyone else out, this isn't going to change. Gaming needs to achieve some kind of credibility before really intelligent, experimental games start getting made.
Morgan Fellows

games™: Your argument makes sense, but the problem is that 'underground' hits tend to sell in such pitiful numbers that most developers and publishers are left with little option other than to give the masses what they want – wouldn't you if your livelihood depended upon it? High-mindedness is all well and good, but at the expense of jobs and profit? We think not. In an ideal world every game released by every publisher would be a masterpiece, allowing developers to create a reputation that gamers would trust, which in turn might enable them to create unique games that would also sell. That simply isn't going to happen, whether 'Mr. Suit' is involved or not. Thankfully, though, there are enough developers out there committed to marrying quality gaming with mainstream appeal.

I'VE BEEN PLAYING computer games for about two decades, and I've always preferred the depth and intricacy of PC games as opposed to ease-of-use console games. In all that time I have been quite happy to edit config.sys or autoexec.bat, or download patches because the games were better. But that time is gone.

I barely find time to play games at all any more, and I can't waste the time I do have messing around with options and settings and patches and drivers, especially as in the past few months I've bought a number of games, including *Rome: Total War*, *Half-Life 2* and *Halo 2* – all of which I have been waiting years

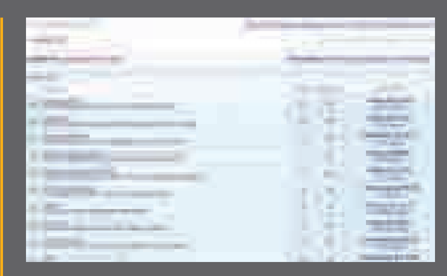


Well, *Halo 2* may not be as good as some PC games, but at least it works…



Sometimes you don't have time to go round conquering the free world. Or the free world seizes up and crashes.





FROM THE FORUM

IS NINTENDO PUTTING TOO MANY POKÉ-EGGS INTO ONE BASKET?

"GAMES ARE **STILL SEEN AS GEEKY OR FOR KIDS**. UNTIL GAMERS STOP ACTING LIKE GEEKY KIDS, OR AT LEAST UNTIL THE **GEEKY KIDS STOP DROWNING PEOPLE OUT**, THIS WON'T CHANGE"

for. But the only one I find myself playing now is *Halo 2*.

Rome: Total War is my perfect game. It's deep, it's fascinating, it's the latest and best in a series that has swallowed large portions of my life. The day it arrived I played it for 11 hours. Well, in a sense. You see, it crashes. A lot. Out of those 11 hours I managed one hour of actual progress. Activision's so-called 'support' was limited to "update your drivers, reinstall Windows, still doesn't work? Sorry. Give up."

A few weeks later, *Half-Life 2* arrived. After a two-hour wait while it installed (why exactly does Steam need to know how many children I've got?) I finally got into the gameplay, and it looked simply incredible. For all of about 15 seconds, when it crashed. Ten days have passed and I've never had it run for more than that first 15 seconds. Valve's technical support? Non-existent. I've not even had an acknowledgement of my support request.

And what of *Halo 2*? Well, the graphics are nothing compared to *Half-Life 2*, the gameplay is alright if uninspired, and the controller is clunky compared to mouse and keyboard. But it works, so I'm playing it, and enjoying it.

No wonder the PC games market is dying. No more excuses, no more messing about – if PC game makers want to sell games they need to make them so they work without crashing. Or failing that – as I fully understand the complications of infinitely varied kit – at least employ competent support staff who are willing and able to help.

Andy Patrick

games™: Sorry to hear about your shoddy help-line experiences – we've always been fairly well-treated at the hands of tech support. Then again, perhaps you've just got a duff PC. See, if you stick with a 286 and play *Minesweeper* there's much less to go wrong. That's our advice and we don't charge 90 pence a minute.

MEET ME, YOUR typical hardcore gamer-cum-complete fanboy. A few years back all that would spout from my mouth was my love for Sega and its ill-fated Dreamcast. Doomed as it was, it was still a great console, but that shouldn't have stopped me broadening my horizons.

Moving into the next generation of consoles, I made a switch to the GameCube. Once again I continued to argue with my peers over the overwhelming quality of Nintendo's new console. Until I did the unthinkable: I jumped out of bed with GameCube and decided to give the Xbox a spin – there was no looking back.

For once I actually had two consoles sitting beneath my overworked telly and I was prepared to buy the best games for both of them. No more was I pinned down to *Super Mario*, but I could play a bit of *Halo* before tea and some *Zelda* afterwards.

My fanboyish attitude is now a thing of the past and my advice to other **games™** readers is to play the field a little. A year on since I tried I have seen some great GameCube gaming but also have enjoyed the likes of *Halo*, *Project Gotham Racing 2* and *RalliSport Challenge 2*. Come next week there'll be another little black box under my TV, it goes by the name of PS2. You might have heard of it…

Sammy Barker

games™: Without love there is nothing – long live experiencing all that videogaming has to offer on all platforms.



flint blackman
I'm sure this question has been asked before, but did Pokémon save Nintendo's bacon? I mean, look at how many Pokémon games Nintendo has thrown out since Pokémon arrived – I think that there are more Pokémon games in the last five years than there have ever been Mario games. I like Nintendo, but I think it has milked Pokémon to death because it's the only thing bringing in the big money. So, would Nintendo still be making consoles if Pokémon was not such a global success? I suspect that Nintendo would just be a software company by now if not for Pokémon.

Elimin8tor
Just think… without Pokémon, Nintendo might have been bought out (despite Yamauchi's stubborn ways) and we'd probably be playing the next Mario game on the Xbox! *cringes*

Tachikoma
That might not be a bad thing – look at Sega. I was more sad than most when it decided to become a software-only developer, but it has done wonders for the company!

burntoutbanger
Did *Halo* save Xbox? Did company reputation save the first PlayStation?

Elimin8tor
Halo definitely saved Xbox; without it (at launch) titles like *DOA* and *Project Gotham Racing* (though good) would have made it look like just another console. Did PSone need saving? Sony's smart move to advertise games as cool helped it along. Plus everyone was amazed at the PlayStation's FMV capability. Also Nintendo had a reputation of making the best games back then but did the average Joe care? Even with its unique games is the GC doing as well as the competition?

Kapp'n
Pokémon Ruby and *Sapphire* weren't exactly milking the franchise – they're only the third set of GB Pokémon games. Nintendo might put Mario and co. into other genres, but when it does, it makes good games (unlike certain companies). If you get a big seller, you make merchandise and get as much money as you can, not just drop it and risk a new character failing to interest the public. Pokémon products may have added a few digits to the end of Nintendo's sales figures, but products like the Game Boy would have kept its bank balance out of the red for ages. To be honest, as long as it has the money to produce the next 'Triple A' *Zeldas* and *Marios*, then I'm not complaining.

Darth Darthy
The Game Boy saved Nintendo. Pokémon saved the Game Boy. The end. This short story is © Darth Darthy. And games™. And its forum.

"I'll let you pass by here if you win three 'janken' matches"



